

choice

NOVEMBER 2011
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THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

FOREIGN FILLINGS

See the world from
dentist's chair

U VS NZ

The great
wine war

TESTS

fuel ranges
sandwich presses
dishwashers
digital set-top boxes
GPS units
child safety devices
FLs
bike locks
lawnmowers

187
products
reviewed!



+ iPHONE 4S
First look p5

ANTIBACTERIALS

Are they making us sick?

2011 Shonky Awards

Who's left a sour taste this year?

Speak up and take action

This month, CHOICE's Shonky Awards spotlight dodgy organisations and dubious products.



Find out where this year's lemons have landed on page 16

Our vision for Australians to become the most savvy and active consumers in the world is at the heart of everything CHOICE does. We're proud that as a result of our work and your individual actions, people are increasingly prepared to speak up to improve their lives as consumers.

Take the CHOICE Big Bank Switch, where more than 40,000 people registered to take part. Offers have now been negotiated in each state, with every deal a genuine group discount. We've also been encouraging people to shop around, look at what's on offer and try to negotiate better deals with their own provider. Our initiative has drawn some criticism from vested interests, but any action that levels the playing field between big business and consumers is likely to do just that.

Or, take the recent furore about Gasp, the fashion retailer in Melbourne where bride-to-be Keara O'Neill was so insulted by the sales assistant that she left the store with her bridesmaids in tow. Keara followed up with a polite but indignant email to the company, only to receive an outrageously rude and arrogant response. The email exchange found its way onto Twitter and Facebook and with every second that goes by, the public reaction seems to grow more

hostile. To top it off, Gasp attempted to delete many negative comments from its Facebook page, censoring and further incensing an already outraged public.

Luckily for Gasp, this happened a couple of weeks after nominations for this year's Shonky Awards closed. This year's lemon award winners highlight the worst of the worst – see page 16.

Shining a light on good, bad and plain shonky behaviour is a cornerstone of what we do at CHOICE. It is often your experiences that lead us to the very worst examples of corporate behaviour, and we make sure we share your experiences far and wide. What we all do with that information is what makes the difference, which is why it's so important to take action. It can be as simple as voting with your wallets and taking your money elsewhere or signing up to a CHOICE campaign.

As always, when it comes to us, please speak up about what you like, dislike, and areas in which you would like to see us do more or less. It's by listening to you that we've been able to bring about real changes to this organisation, something we'll continue to do.

Nick Stace, CEO

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CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for all the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, www.choice.com.au and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

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Do you really need salt in your dishwasher? Find out on page 52

Mohamed Jawahir likes to keep things clean

Ageing beauties

Vintage beers are the real deal, but consumers need to be wary of brewers producing beers not suitable for ageing, say experts.

A number of beers on the market are now labelled with a year, similar to the way wines are labelled, suggesting they may be suitable for ageing. But Matt Kirkegaard, freelance beer writer and educator, says some breweries target the consumer mindset. "There are some beers that have been brought out that are suitable for ageing," he says. "But then there are some beers brought out that appeal to the wine buyer's mindset."

Beers bearing a date include Moorilla Imperial Stout, Endeavour Reserve Pale and Amber Ales, and Coopers Extra Strong Vintage Ale.

Bill Taylor, Chief Brewer at Lion, says aged beers aren't always better than fresh beers, and it often comes down to personal taste. "While some say the beer gets better with age, it is probably more accurate to say the beer gets 'different'."

Vintage beer buying tips

- ✓ **Look for a high alcohol content** – usually seven per cent or higher.
- ✓ **Choose darker beers** as they often work best.
- ✓ **Age in a cool, dark place** – between 5°C-15 °C. Ageing time varies by beer.

ADAM GLYDE



Spotlight on energy sales tactics

Electricity prices have gone up by, on average, 70% across states (including inflation) since 2007, according to the ACCC. And, at a time when consumers are looking for savings, energy retailers are using door-to-door sales tactics to build their market share – with some salespeople using misleading or unconscionable practices.

Recently, the Victorian Energy and Water Ombudsman reported cases in which consumers agreed to give their details to receive more information,

but instead were directly transferred to the new retailer.

CHOICE is focusing on reforming the energy sector so that it works better for consumers. "Consumers need to clearly understand their energy needs and use to transparently compare products, without being bombarded by complexity," says CHOICE Head of Campaigns, Matt Levey.

To complain about energy door-to-door salespeople, contact the ACCC on 1300 302 502.

UTA MIHM

Slings under scrutiny

After the death of a two-day-old baby in South Australia, the ACCC is considering mandatory standards for baby slings. The baby died while being carried by his mother in a cloth sling under her clothing. While the autopsy report didn't point to the sling as the cause, it was strongly implicated.

"The ACCC is working with the product safety regulators in the US, Canada and Europe on the development of the safety standard for baby slings as a result of concerns... about the risk that they pose, in particular for very young infants," says ACCC deputy chairman, Peter Kell.

Sixteen deaths attributed to slings have been recorded in the US and Canada. The US Consumer Product Safety Commission has also called for mandatory standards.

UTA MIHM

Sling safe

Avoid bag-slings described as 'womb-like', a 'cocoon', or simulating a foetal position, as these could cause your baby to have breathing difficulties

BREAKING NEWS

Tone it down

In October 2010, CHOICE reviewed toning shoes to see whether they live up to their claims, and we concluded they were no better than regular sports shoes. The US Federal Trade Commission has now taken action against Reebok, announcing "Reebok has agreed to resolve charges that the company deceptively advertised 'toning shoes', which it claimed would provide extra tone and strength to leg and buttock muscles." There's US\$25 million in refunds up for grabs internationally.

Faulty hips

Thousands of patients have had faulty prostheses fitted during hip replacement surgery, according to the National Joint Replacement Registry. In 2010, about 36,000 hip replacement operations were performed, more than 1500 of which involved the fitting of prostheses already reported to be performing poorly. Patients with a faulty prosthesis are more likely to need a painful follow-up operation. If you've had problems with your hip or knee replacement surgery, contact money@choice.com.au.

Unsafe Sony

Sony has announced an overheating issue affecting 40" Bravia LCD TVs on sale during 2007/2008. The model numbers are: KDL-40X3100, KDL-40XBR, KDL-40W3100. These may overheat, which could melt their upper rear casing. If you're concerned, call Sony on 1300 13 7669 for a free inspection and, if necessary, a free repair.



FIRST LOOK

The freshest Apple of all

Don't judge an iPhone by its cover. The new iPhone 4S looks almost identical to the iPhone 4, but inside it's a whole new ball game. It comes with the same, dual-core processor found in the iPad 2, the camera handles up to eight megapixels and has an extra lens to assist with low light, while video resolution has been bumped up to full 1080p.

It's the software that really sets the iPhone 4S apart from the opposition. It comes with iOS 5, which Apple claims has 200 new features, including a new notification centre, free SMS-style messaging of text, photos and video between iOS 5 users and a new digital magazine store called Newsstand.

When Apple released the iPhone 3GS model two years ago it said the S stood for speed. Apple hasn't said what the S stands for this time, but we're guessing Siri, the iPhone's new artificial intelligence (AI) personal assistant software that lets you talk to the phone to request information and give instructions.

More than just voice recognition, Siri recognises and responds to everyday language, recognising the context of

queries rather than just specific voice commands. And, it also talks back to you. This may well be remembered as the year we started talking to our phones, rather than just talking on them.

Being cautious, we started off talking to Siri a little carefully, much as you would to a small child. But after using it for even an hour or so you'll find you can relax and talk normally and it still does an impressive job of understanding what you mean. This could well be the start of a beautiful friendship.

CHOICE verdict

As a stand-alone smartphone, the iPhone 4S is up there with the best of them, but no other phone offers the type of AI you get with Siri, or the integrated ecosystem of iCloud and iTunes. It's definitely worth a look if you need a new phone and also a personal helper.

STEVE DUNCOMBE

IPHONE 4S

PRICE from \$799 for 16GB

CONTACT apple.com.au/iphone



Chery bombs

Chinese-made Chery vehicles may be a cheap ride, starting at \$11,990 drive away, but their safety has been called into question following two recent product recalls.

In the second safety recall for the manufacturer within two months, 1664 Chery J11 SUV models were recalled because they may not protect occupants in a side-on crash.

The J11 has also been given a poor safety rating by ANCAP, the independent organisation that tests new cars for safety in Australia. ANCAP has given the J11 an interim rating of just two stars out of a possible five, pending side-impact testing, which has been delayed by the recall.

The J11 rates even lower than its sedan counterpart, the Chery J1, which has three ANCAP stars. The J1 was subject to a recall in August due to a defect with its front-seat backrests. If that wasn't enough, the J1 is also up for one of our Shonky Awards this year – see page 16 for more. **SIORAH DONOHUE**



'Coke and fries' deal junked

Blackmores and the Pharmacy Guild recently created a furore when they announced a joint initiative to provide and sell companion supplements for certain prescription medicines, describing them as "coke and fries" to go with the medicines. Pharmacists were to receive a computer prompt when filling scripts for certain medications, suggesting the patient use one of the Guild-endorsed Blackmores supplements.

However, in the face of a vociferous backlash against the concept, the Guild has backed out of the deal.

Complementary medicines aren't subject to the same scrutiny as prescription medicines, an issue of concern to many health advocates, including CHOICE. The National Prescribing Service has found that

there's little to recommend the supplements. In addition, the more medications and supplements you take, the greater the likelihood of interactions between them and the higher the chance of an adverse event.

A recent audit of the Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) regulation of complementary medicines made several recommendations to increase transparency and enhance consumer understanding of how much proof there is of the efficacy of these sorts of products. One recommendation, which CHOICE supports, was that the TGA place a summary of evidence for products collected from sponsors, as well as a clear indication as to whether the TGA has assessed or evaluated the evidence presented.

KARINA BRAY

Shameful shortfall

Infectious disease specialists are furious at CSL, Australia's only major home-grown originator of pharmaceutical products, for letting critical medicines run low.

As some health professionals were reminded last month, CSL is

the only company that supplies Australia with the most commonly used form of penicillin – benzylpenicillin. The alarm was raised with about a week's supply left. The situation didn't sit well with Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Chris Baggeley, who had to scramble to make sure

critical needs were met. The Australian Medical Association wasn't happy either, likening the industry's short-term supply approach to a supermarket mentality.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN





Charity starts at home

Coles will donate fresh food to those in need in partnership with charity organisation SecondBite.

The program will see a total of 665 stores involved. Stuart Machin, Coles Store Development and Operations Director, said the program will allow Coles to rescue food which didn't meet the standards required for sale.

Ian Carson, Chair and Co-founder of SecondBite, said the program will bring positive changes to Australians experiencing tough times. In a pilot running since August 2010, SecondBite has collected more than 25 tonnes of food from Coles, equating to more than 50,000 meals produced.

ADAM GLYDE

Scalpers ticketed

Online ticketing site ticketfinders.com.au was banned from offering tickets to the recent AFL Grand Final after the Victorian planning department alleged the site was selling them at inflated prices.

Adam McArthur, CEO of News Ticketing, believes ticket sellers are

winning the battle against scalping. "It only arises when sell-outs occur, which are rare in Australia," he said.

A November 2010 Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council report found the that internet has heightened the visibility of scalping. One problem preventing regulation is the difficulty in finding those responsible.

A NSW Fair Trading spokesperson said sales by ticket scalpers are less than five per cent of the total market for tickets sold in Australia each year. Laws are in place to protect consumers, but McArthur said the best protection is to purchase direct from the promoter or through authorised sellers only.

ADAM GLYDE

Not so super

Research conducted by the Industry Super Network (ISN) shows some investors would have been better off putting their super contributions in the bank rather than a retail super fund. The ISN assessed the performance of all super funds regulated by APRA over the 14 years from June 1996, and found the average rate of return was 5.01%. But retail funds delivered returns of just 3.66% on average. If retail funds had earned the same as industry super funds over the 14 years, member assets would have increased by about \$83 billion.

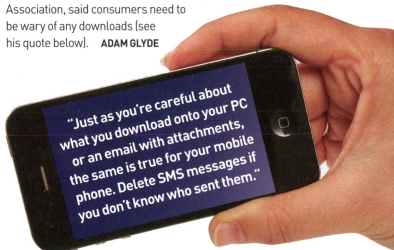
ANISHA KHOPKAR

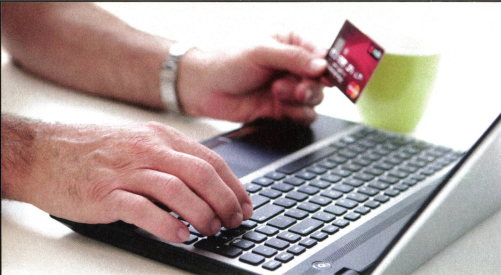
When apps attack!

Mobile phone apps may receive greater regulation under new laws proposed in the UK. The proposal comes after concerns rogue apps can potentially sign users up to premium services without their knowledge.

A recent case there involved allegations that apps signed unwitting users up to the BuboMe Premium Videos service. Mobile provider mBlox was fined £135,000 and ordered to refund all victims. Randal Markey, Communications Manager at the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association, said consumers need to be wary of any downloads [see his quote below].

ADAM GLYDE





Online checkout

More shoppers are using online grocers and other daily deal sites to support their weekly grocery shop according to experts, as more and more people jump online to find ways to save.

Stacey Carlon, co-founder and director of online grocery site offyourtrolley.com.au, says many of their customers come to the site looking for ways to ease the strain on their household budget. "We have a limited range but we can provide a service," she says. "Quite often, people come to stock up before going to a supermarket. Our business has almost doubled over the past year."

Available to anyone, daily deal sites send out an email offering subscribers a chance to buy certain goods or services

on that day. They adopt a first in, best dressed approach, with a set number of a certain good available to buy within a limited period of time. Once the quota is reached or the time is up, the deal is completed and users receive their goods. These can be groceries with old packaging or nearing their use-by date.

Dr Sean Sands from the Australian Centre for Retail Studies at Monash University says online grocery sites are more likely to be supporting rather than competing with the major supermarkets. "There may be a place for this channel in offering consumers the ability to have a weekly delivery of core items (staples) and then top-up shopping can be in person."

ADAM GLYDE

Sneaky salt

Bread manufacturers have a long way to go if they're to meet the government's voluntary sodium target for bread products of 400mg/100g by 2013.

According to research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, the proportion of bread products meeting the target increased from 29% in 2007 to 50% in 2010. However, the average

levels of sodium in breads increased from 434mg/100g to 435 mg/100g over the same period. The research also found differences between the mean sodium contents of breads produced by different manufacturers in 2010 – 394mg/100g for George Weston Foods bread products compared with 455mg/100g for Goodman Fielder bread products.

Some three-quarters of the sodium in Australian diets is from processed foods, with bread providing about a fifth of daily intake. RACHEL CLEMONS



Bogus bucks

Counterfeit cash is on the rise according to a new report from the RBA. The number of counterfeit notes found increased to 17,802 in 2010/11 up from 7836 in 2009/10. And those are just the fake bills that were detected, most of which were \$50 notes.

Despite the increase, counterfeiting remains low here compared with other countries, with only every 16 notes per million being counterfeit. Currently there are about \$50 billion worth of banknotes circulating in Australia – a figure that continues to rise.

BRENDAN MAYS

\$7.8bn

What Australians will spend on pet products and services in 2011-12

63%

of Australian households have pets

\$1460

Average household spend per year on their pets

IBISWorld



> I SAY

Girl racer

In an effort to save money and be a teensy bit nicer to the environment, earlier this year I decided it was time to trade in my much-loved car – Doris, a 1959 Morris Minor. I live and work close to the city, and reckoned a combination of car share and foot power would handle most of my transport requirements. Add to that a motorscooter to circumvent Sydney's notoriously bad public transport, and I figured I was sorted.

Fast forward a few months and I've got my L plates and a dinky little 50cc scooter named Juliet (pictured). It's the automotive equivalent of a hairdryer with wheels, but after 10 years driving an old Morris I'm okay with that.

Unfortunately, it also gave me a taste for the two-wheeling life. I'd find myself checking out other people's rides and browsing the net to see what's around. It was one fateful Sunday evening that saw me cruising eBay, glass of wine in hand, peeking at scooters for sale.

I do a lot of shopping online, but there's something about the thrill of the chase with eBay. I don't know if it's watching the countdown clock or trying to out-do everyone else in those last few seconds of bidding, but there's something tantalising about the auction process.

So that night, daydreaming of Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday* and fuelled by wine, I put in a bid for a very cute, blue 1950s Vespa.

And won it.

Buyer's regret kicked in almost immediately. It was unregistered! I hadn't even seen it! What if it didn't work! I had Juliet! I still hadn't sold Doris!

I needed another wine.

Luckily, my story has a happy ending. The Vespa is in great

"There's something about the thrill of the chase with eBay"

condition and has just been registered. She – they're always girls, aren't they? – doesn't have a name yet, and I have to go and get my learner's permit for a manual bike.

I was fortunate, but my story might not have had a happy ending. There's probably a lesson for me to curb my competitive nature. Or maybe it's just that eBay and wine don't mix.

In the meantime, so much for reducing my footprint – I still have my other scooter and a Morris Minor. Maybe I should put them on eBay?

MARY GILLESPIE

Mental fix

Researchers claim that the caffeine hit many coffee drinkers seek can be reached with a decaf placebo. Researchers studied volunteers who were given decaf or regular coffee and told it either contained caffeine or not. The volunteers who were told they were given caffeine were as quick in their performance, even if they drank decaf. The results suggest caffeine "expectation" can affect mood and performance rather than merely the caffeine alone. A report on the research study was published in the international research journal *Appetite*.

KATE BROWNE

Palmed off

A bill co-sponsored by the independents and the Greens calling for mandatory palm oil labelling on Australian food labels has been rejected by a federal parliamentary standing committee, citing increased food costs and damage to Australia's trade relationships.

CHOICE is calling on government to implement the recommendation from a major, independent review of food labelling and introduce mandatory palm oil labelling so consumers can make an informed decision about what they eat.

ANGELA MCDUGALL



choice MEMBERS NOTICEBOARD

Member spotlight

Georgie Crawford-Smith is a personal trainer and married with three children.

Why did you join CHOICE?

We were returning from living in the US and needed to purchase many appliances.

What section of CHOICE magazine do you read first? And why?

I usually look at the index first to see which products are being evaluated.

Have you made any CHOICE Recommended or Best Buy purchases?

Yes, a toaster, vacuum cleaner, Thermomix and washing machine.

We are just about to buy a lawnmower (see page 71) and naturally will be consulting CHOICE beforehand.

What would you like to see CHOICE put to the test?

Foods, kitchen products and sporting goods for training outside. My daughter would like CHOICE to test hair straighteners and teen beauty products.

If you would like to be in our next Member Spotlight, please email your details to inthespotlight@choice.com.au



Georgie Crawford-Smith

Voting members

In September, our Chair Jenni Mack, invited CHOICE Plus members and members of more than five years standing to become a voting member. We received an outstanding response and have increased our voting member base to 1600.

As a result, we will be inviting eligible members to become a voting member, annually. We welcome all our new voting members and thank you for your ongoing support.

CHOICE Mobile

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Go to choice.com.au or call our Customer Service Team on 1800 069 552.

choice
MOBILE

CHOICE lab tours

CHOICE invites members in Sydney to join us for our next famous lab tour on Thursday 17 November. The tour will commence at 10.30am with morning tea and an opportunity to chat with Nick Stace and Christopher Zinn. Then you'll head to our many labs for a behind-the-scenes look at how our tests are performed and get to meet some of our testers. Email member@choice.com.au for more.



CHOICE is the perfect gift



Not sure what to buy this Christmas?
Give the gift of choice with a CHOICE membership. See page 24 for more details.



The electric sheep

Husqvarna's Automower 305 is the newest (and smallest) addition to their robotic mower line-up and is designed for lawns up to 500m². Husqvarna compares its operation to that of a grazing sheep – “cut just a little, all the time, in a random pattern”. It uses razor-sharp blades to cut the lawn only a millimetre or two at a time, with the fine cuttings mulching the lawn.

Our tester, Brian Champion, found the initial setup tedious, mainly due to the need to install a special boundary wire around the area to be mowed. The Automower senses this wire and won't stray over it. However, if the wire is even a little above ground level, there's a chance the Automower can damage it.

Once the wire is installed and the recharging station is set up, the Automower can be left to do its thing.

Different yard shapes can be programmed so that it knows to tackle the areas furthest away first (while it has plenty of charge) before working its way back to the charging station. We found it runs for almost an hour, mowing in a random pattern, then returns to recharge for a little more than two hours before setting out again. It has no trouble finding and docking with its recharging station thanks to a guide wire that the

Automower uses to help steer itself into the station. Overall it does a neat job of mowing and over a few months, with the fine mulching effect, we'd expect the lawn to be in good condition. You need to keep the lawn clear of fallen branches, toys and so on so that the Automower won't get stuck or be forced to mow around the obstacles.

CHOICE verdict

It's a clever machine, and with the right set up in a suitable yard, should maintain the lawn effectively. On performance alone our tester gives it four stars, but when factoring in the price, setting up and other limitations, we'd only give it two and a half. The only other option for having a well-maintained lawn without doing it yourself is to pay about \$840 per year for a mowing service. For that reason, we're rating the Automower on performance alone. It's not for everyone, but for the right home it's a good option. That, or get a sheep.

CHRIS BARNES

HUSQVARNA AUTOMOWER 305

PRICE \$1999

CONTACT automower.com.au



Diet risk for teens

Poor diet could be a risk factor for mental health problems during adolescence, according to health researchers at Deakin University in Victoria.

The findings, recently published in the journal *PLoS One*, suggest diet quality can be used to predict mental health in adolescents over time.

For the study, the researchers analysed data collected from more than 3000 Australian adolescents in 2005 and again two years later.

Dr Felice Jacka from Deakin University's Barwon Psychiatric Research Unit led the study. “On average, adolescents whose diets improved over the two-year period experienced an improvement in mental health over that time,” she said.

“In contrast, those adolescents whose dietary quality deteriorated experienced a deterioration in mental health. This wasn't explained by changes in physical activity levels or weight.”

KATE BROWNE

“Adolescents whose diets improved over the two-year period experienced an improvement in mental health over that time”

Can you help?

Have you ever used an interest-free deal or lease? Were you stung by high costs, interest rates or fees? How easy was it to understand all the terms and conditions? Email us at money@choice.com.au and please include a daytime phone number.

Remote control

Remote access computer scams happen when you hand control of your computer to a scammer posing as a technician. One in particular – in which consumers are asked to run the Microsoft Windows Event Viewer while the scammer pretends to look for viruses – has been sweeping the globe. After the bogus fix-up is done, you're asked to hand over your credit card details to pay for it.

With 7800 complaints to the ACCC in the year to June and about 780 confirmed rip-offs, the flim flam shows no sign of slowing down.

Now, the ACCC is taking a more holistic approach to computer scams and considering tighter regulations on software companies that provide remote login services – often used by scammers to gain unauthorised computer access. Whether clamping down on these services will make a

difference, however, remains up for debate. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**

Hard bargain

Tough times in the retail sector have one of Australia's biggest discounters playing hardball. Target recently told its largest suppliers it's lopping five per cent off what it will pay for all shipments until 23 December. The retailer said it made the move because the suppliers had failed to offer better terms during the height of the strong Aussie dollar. Managing director Laura Inman pointed out that Christmas 2011 orders were placed as early as January this year. She said the chain had already cut its profit margins to avoid raising prices.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

**FIRST
LOOK**



OMO pods lack powder's punch

OMO's new Small & Mighty Liquid Pods (previously called capsules) are basically a water-soluble capsule filled with liquid detergent that you place directly into your machine before throwing in the clothes.

OMO claims the detergent in these pods will give outstanding results because it contains 50% more pre-treaters. Sure enough, compared with other front loader liquid detergents in our recent laundry detergent test (see *CHOICE*, July 2011) it ranks first overall with 69% – but only just, with Dynamo close behind on 68%.

The OMO pods' general detergency score of 82% is very high for a liquid – almost as good some of the top-rating powders – but their overall performance is let down by an only OK score of 59% for grass stain removal and only 54% for tomato stain removal. While 59% stain removal for grass is not a great score, it's relatively high for a liquid, whereas 54% for tomato stain removal is relatively low.

And although its performance is pretty good for a liquid, it's a high price to pay at 69 cents per wash – particularly when you can get significantly better

results with the powder equivalent, Omo Small and Mighty Concentrate, for only 53 cents per wash. More importantly, with the powder detergent you can adjust the dose as necessary for extra cost savings – a half dose at 28 cents per wash still gives you markedly better wash results than using these liquid pods.

CHOICE verdict

These pods perform well for a liquid and are convenient, so they may suit busy people who want minimal fuss and always wash a full load. But for most people, they're not very cost effective or versatile as you can't adjust the dose as needed. And, you can get much better results using the powder equivalent.

MARTHA PSIROUKIS

OMO SMALL & MIGHTY LIQUID PODS FRONT LOADER

PRICE \$13.88 (for 20 capsules)

COST PER WASH 69 cents

CONTACT omo.com.au

Not suitable for washer/dryers



\$36,200

The average cost
of an Australian
wedding



No budget blitz for wedded bliss

While many consumers are pulling back on spending, when it comes to Australian weddings it's more of a case of sensible splurging.

Market researchers IBISWorld have revealed wedding spending is on the up with Aussie couples spending an average of \$36,200 – a 6.5% increase on 2010/11. Our wedding industry is worth \$4.3 billion and is expected to reach \$4.7 billion in five years.

An IBISWorld report shows the venue is the biggest cost, followed by dresses, clothing and accessories. IBISWorld expects the \$942 million spent on wedding clothes to increase by almost seven per cent over the next five years.

When it comes to savings, it's bad news for wedding photographers. The report shows a costs decrease as more people take advantage of cheaper, digital technologies. **KATE BROWNE**

Hope for diabetics

Aussie scientists say they've found a link between a high-fat diet and type two diabetes. Research by Sydney's Garvan Institute suggests the Id1 gene is the master regulator of other genes in a beta cell, and is switched on when people eat a high-fat diet. Scientists are already developing a compound to block the Id1 gene for use in cancer treatment and will now try treating diabetic mice. If they can delay diabetes or improve insulin secretion in mice, there may be new hope for people with diabetes. **KATE BROWNE**

Toons on tins

Recent research has found 70% of promotional characters on Australian food packets spruik products to children that are high in fat, salt and sugar. The research was conducted by Cancer Council NSW with the University of Sydney's Prevention Research Collaboration.

Of the 352 products studied that had promotional characters on their packaging, 248 were for foods classified as unhealthy.

Like CHOICE, the Cancer Council wants compulsory regulations to stop companies promoting junk food to kids through characters, competitions and other similar tactics – see junkbusters.com.au for more. **RACHEL CLEMONS**



In hot water?

Several consumers have complained on online forums – including choice.com.au – about the internal water recirculating pumps in some Rheem heat pumps failing after only 12 months, barely out of their warranty period.

The system then switches to operating on electric booster elements, essentially functioning as a traditional electric hot water system (HWS) and racking up the associated extra running costs. On top of this, replacing the pump could cost hundreds. Users also cannot easily tell if their HWS has failed, as the red warning LED on the control board that flashes when the unit trips on high temperature is not visible until metal covers are removed.

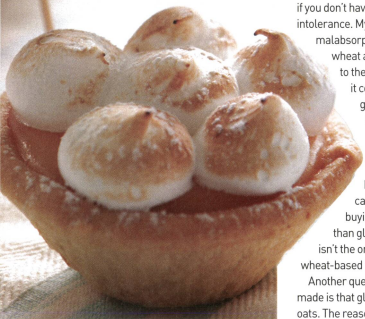
A Rheem spokesperson told CHOICE that the company "has been contacted by a small number of owners of heat pumps who've raised concerns, and... is working through each case on an individual basis".

No matter how long a manufacturer's warranty, consumers are entitled to a statutory warranty that entitles them to repair, replacement or refund of a product should it fail within an unreasonable length of time. Rheem offers a five-year warranty for the cylinders of its heat pump HWS, suggesting it believes a system should last at least this long. Rheem voluntarily recalled some other Rheem and Everhot heat pump products last year. **SAM BUTLER**

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If you've had a bad experience you can help other CHOICE members avoid scams and rip-offs. If you've had a great response to a complaint, our members want to know about that too! Email us at yoursay@choice.com.au or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Going
gluten-free



Going gluten-free is good for non-coeliacs too

In your story on gluten-free products (CHOICE, September 2011) you claimed that gluten-free food is no healthier for you if you don't have coeliac disease or a gluten intolerance. My partner has fructose malabsorption and needs to avoid wheat as a major ingredient due to the high amount of fructans it contains. So we buy a lot of gluten-free foods to avoid the fructans. Most gluten-free foods on the market also exclude dairy products, which is another ingredient he needs to avoid. So there can be many reasons for buying gluten-free foods other than gluten intolerance, as gluten isn't the only problematic part of wheat-based foods.

Another questionable statement you made is that gluten occurs naturally in oats. The reason people with coeliac

disease must not eat Australian oats is because they're processed, transported and stored using the same equipment as wheat and other gluten-containing grains and therefore may contain trace amounts of gluten. People who have coeliac disease can buy oats from the US and other countries where the laws regarding handling of oats are different.

Tracey Van Grunsven, Somerville, Vic

CHOICE SAYS Oats contain a form of gluten called *avenin*, which is different to the gluten found in wheat, rye, barley and other grains. Many, but not all, people sensitive to gluten can tolerate *avenin*. Contamination is also an issue, and some companies sell oats, including Australian oats, grown and processed to be guaranteed free of gluten from wheat and other grains. As Tracey points out, gluten-free products may also be suitable for people with food intolerances other than gluten intolerance.

Thumbs



Annemarie van Nieuwenhuijze (of Tyaak, Vic) would like to give a big thumbs up to Felton Grimwade & Bosisto's (FGB), which makes the Euky Bear steam vaporisers. "Our vaporiser stopped working for no obvious reason – it was about three years old and I didn't have the receipt for it. I emailed FGB to ask where I could send it to get it fixed, and they sent me a new vaporiser for free."



If you've ever wondered whether it's worth complaining about breaches of your Do Not Call (DNC)

registration, **Robin Howells** (of Nunawading, Vic) experience suggests it is. After being cold-called by Optus, Robin complained to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), who accepted enforceable undertakings from Optus to implement measures designed to ensure DNC customers aren't contacted, earning a big thumbs up to ACMA.



Liz Angeletti of Renmark SA is very happy with Maui Jim's after-sales service. When she broke the arm off a pair of two-year-old sunglasses they

sent a replacement arm immediately, at no cost. They're also replacing a broken hinge on her glasses case.



When **Sally Tippet**'s (of Frankston Heights, Vic) two-year-old silver and gold Pandora bracelet snapped in half, she contacted Pandora, who advised her to drop it in to one of their stores for assessment. They have since replaced the bracelet – which was out of warranty – at no cost.





All abuzz for summer

It's great that you're now alerting people to the noise from ceiling fans that may be caused by ripple control signals sent down the wires at certain times by some electricity distributors. These signals activate relays that switch appliances such as water heaters and pool pumps on and off [See *CHOICE*, September 2011].

It's important to note that the noise doesn't occur all the time – it only occurs during the short periods when the signals are being sent – and takes the form of an intermittent buzz or hum. But because many signals are sent during the night, the noise from an affected ceiling fan can be loud enough to wake you up.

Consumers with this problem should first contact their electricity distributor to fix it because they're causing the problem. If the signal voltage is too high they can reduce it at the source, which may eliminate or greatly reduce the noise. Or, they may need to fit a filter close to the affected premises. In my case, where three fans were affected, they did both and it worked OK until recently. I have contacted the distributor again. Any consumer dissatisfied with how the distributor deals with the complaint can – at no cost – have the matter investigated by the relevant energy ombudsman.

Of course, this problem would not exist if the standards for ceiling fans required that they be immune to these signals, but this could take a long time to achieve. In the meantime, fans without built-in immunity should have to indicate this prominently on the box so you know exactly what you're buying. And, it would be good if immunity to these signals could be included in future *CHOICE* testing of ceiling fans.

Ian Jarratt, Auchenflower, Qld

CHOICE SAYS Thanks for your email, Ian. As you guessed, we could not accommodate a test for the ripple control signal problem. Consumers with a similar problem could take the steps Ian has suggested, starting with contacting their distributor – ask your retailer who it is if you're not sure.

Excremental increments

I recently received a letter from Optus advising a change in "charging increments" for mobile calls. This change to per-minute charging will result in significant over-charging compared with the current per 30 seconds, and all calls are rounded up to the next minute. Could *CHOICE* act on this matter by exposing the proposed changes and lobbying Optus to abandon the changes?

Elizabeth Rose, Burbank, Qld

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The good news about car rental

I encourage you to keep up your Shonky-watching, but it's nice to report on positive experiences with products and services too. My story demonstrates that, for every Shonky, there are plenty of other people out there trying to do the right thing.

In January we booked a Tasmanian holiday, including 10 days hire of a campervan through Budget Car Rentals. We picked it up at Hobart Airport and drove to our first tourist stop. When we went to start the van again, at about 5pm on a Saturday, it wouldn't start. We had two small children with us and little food.

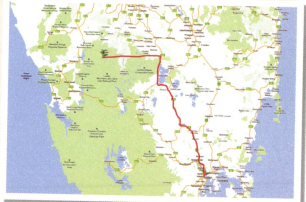
We rang Budget, who were very apologetic. They sent a car and a driver, put us up in a hotel for two days (they could not get a mechanic on Sunday) and lent us another hire car – all at their expense. We got the van back and off we went on what was a great holiday. When we returned the van, my wife had left her

CHOICE SAYS Unfortunately it is not uncommon for consumers to sign up to a mobile contract only for the telco company to change the tariffs mid-contract. *CHOICE* made a complaint to the ACCC about this earlier this year when Telstra changed its billing increments from 30 to 60 seconds. We consider that the ability to change tariffs mid-contract constitutes "unfair contract terms" when a person is unable to leave the contract without additional costs. Unfair contract terms have been prohibited in standard consumer contracts since 1 July 2010. We see Optus is waving any applicable cancellation fees if you decide to cancel your contract due to this change and hope that all the other telco providers will adopt this practice if they change tariffs mid-contract. Now may be the time to see if you are still getting a good deal on your plan.

wedding ring in one of the many compartments. By the time we arrived home, there was a message saying a cleaner had found it. We rang Budget back and they posted it back to us by registered mail – again at their expense.

Les McFarland, Northcote, Vic

CHOICE SAYS We've received many negative stories about car rental companies and several Shonky nominations so it's heartening to read a good news story for a change. As Les suggests, there are probably many other happy customers out there, but these experiences do not seem to excite quite the same passions as negative ones!



And the winner is...

When we put the call out for Shonkys this year, we received hundreds of suggestions - including a surprisingly high number for Telstra. The reasons were varied - bad service, billing issues, their monopoly and problems with the T-Hub. But sadly for them, they're going home without any silverware this year, because we found even bigger lemons to slice.

Now the envelope please.

The 2011 Shonky for...

green hogwash goes to

GO4GREEN ENERGYSMART

Talk of a carbon tax has seen a flurry of activity among entrepreneurs keen to cash in on community paranoia, whipped up by talkback radio and tabloid media. Go4Green EnergySmart claims you'll save 10% on energy bills with its power-saving device. At \$299 a pop, it'll pay for itself in six months.

So why wouldn't you? With the government pledging compensation for increased electricity bills, any savings you make will be money for jam.

The trouble is, it doesn't work. We hooked up a variety of motor-driven devices, such as a vacuum cleaner, drill, grinder and a pump. There were negligible savings - in some cases it cost us marginally more. We then measured the energy usage



of a dryer, washer, air conditioner and a variety of smaller appliances in a house. We plugged in the device as per the instructions and ran the appliances again on the same programs. Our testing found minimal changes in energy consumption. While we saw some changes in power factor and harmonics, these are not taken into account on your electricity bill and so won't save you money.

Professor Vic Gosbell of the University of Wollongong confirmed a device such as this will have little impact on your electricity bill. And we had the electronic componentry valued at \$15. Go4Green has since claimed it is no longer in business, though we were still able to purchase the device through other online retailers as we went to press.

blinded by bedazzling goes to

BABY BLING AND THE INTERNET

For the baby with everything, there's a dummy encrusted with "genuine Swarovski crystals". They're mostly standard dummies from major brands that have been decorated after-market by small businesses. No doubt many well-meaning friends and relatives bought them for little Taylah, not realising they were a veritable minefield of questionable safety (and taste, but that's another story).

Concerned the small crystals might detach and become a choking hazard, the ACCC asked us to check them out. We tested them against certain clauses of the dummy standard to see if the crystals could come off under reasonable force, and they did. The crystals are not only a choking hazard but would also be a hazard if eaten. The ACCC banned them, though blinged-up dummies are still available online from overseas. Most suppliers have a warning on their sites that the dummies are a novelty, not for actual use.





Chery with a Shonky on top goes to

THE CHERY J1

WARNING
ROOF RAILS ARE
FOR COSMETIC PURPOSE ONLY
DO NOT USE

If you haven't heard of Chery, it's a brand of cheap Chinese-made cars that have hit the Australian market in the past year. The J1 hatchback model was one of the first available.

Granted, we were never going to expect a lot from a car that only costs \$11,990. It looks kind of cute, and it seems to go. Okay, so the J1's three-star ANCAP crash test rating isn't too flash, but it could have been a lot worse (Proton Jumbuck, we're looking at you). The recent recall might have rung a few more alarm bells, as well as its initial ban in Victoria

due to an absence of compulsory electronic stability control.

But none of this is why we're giving the J1 a Shonky.

It's because of a little

sticker inconspicuously placed on the inside of the roof rails that warns:

"Roof rails are for cosmetic purpose only. Do not use." Yes, that's right – decorative roof rails. If you use 'em you lose 'em – as well as what's attached. Whatever the "cosmetic purpose" for bearing this car equivalent of a toupee, we're concerned that if the car manages to outlast the sticker and someone buys it second-hand, they won't know not to use the rails.

"Why would you pick anything else?" Chery asks in its ads. To which we respond, "Where do we start?"

spinning out of control briefs goes to

PEACHY PINK

Infused with green tea, peaches and caffeine, Peachy Pink shapewear, when worn eight hours a day for 21 days, is claimed to help you reduce cellulite and lose inches. Peachy Pink claims to be "the ONLY clinically proven anti-cellulite shapewear on the market".

And the well-respected, independent laboratory that did these tests? Turns out it was Spincontrol Laboratories – which, naturally, sent our Shonky radar into meltdown. We checked their website, which proclaims: "2 doses of accuracy, 1 dose of creativity and a touch of audacity". However, the peachy pant's research results haven't been published in any peer-reviewed medical journal.

We'll concede wearing a large tourniquet will reduce how big you look at the time. And, thanks to the redistribution of interstitial fluids, you might temporarily look slightly thinner when it comes off. While caffeine and green tea are used in weight loss supplements and may have a metabolic or diuretic effect, evidence is inconclusive, and there's none for peaches. Assuming there's plenty of caffeine available and maximum possible skin absorption occurs, we calculated you'd get about 70mg per day (two cups of green tea) from the shorts. Why not just drink the tea? ▶

quack (or "chirp") medicine goes to

QUAIL KINGDOM

One CHOICE member drew our attention to Quail Kingdom quail eggs, a health food with "huge benefits". According to its website, quail eggs treat everything from high cholesterol, abnormal blood pressure, tuberculosis, type 1 diabetes, Chernobyl-style excessive radiation, kidney stones, excess weight, hair loss, wrinkles, male potency issues... the list goes on.

Frankly, we were astounded. After years of writing about health and medicine, how on earth did this miracle elixir pass us by? Why does the pharmaceutical industry still even exist? Why go to the doctor when you could simply buy quail eggs?

Thinking the company's own website may not perhaps be the most reliable source of medical information and clinical trial outcomes, we checked up Medline. There wasn't a single clinical trial demonstrating the amazing powers of quail eggs

– no doubt a conspiracy between medical researchers and Big Pharma. Nor were they listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods – surprising, given the high-level therapeutic claims.

Casting a broader net, we checked the internet. There, the value of quail eggs received a lot more credence – and, as we all know, the internet never lies. According to the *Nigerian Tribune*, they even cure cancer!





calamity after the storm goes to

THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY

As the 2011 Queensland, NSW and Victorian floodwaters receded, thousands of homeowners were left high and dry by insurance companies that rejected their claims. In some cases, policyholders failed to read their policies carefully. In numerous others, insurers made it all but impossible to know whether they were covered for flood or not – or exactly what a “flood” is.

In April 2011, when the claims denials began to roll in, RACQ topped the list, followed by NRMA, CGU, AAMI, Allianz, QBE, and Comminsure, according to Queensland Legal Aid. At least 20 other insurers had also denied claims at that

point. Seven months on, about 8660 homeowners have been knocked back, or 15% of claims.

Queensland Legal Aid consumer protection lawyer, Catherine Uhr, told us there’s been plenty of shonky behaviour by insurers. “Insurance sales people had apparently been making sales without telling people there’s a big hole in their policy. A lot of people thought they had no risk. I’m a lawyer who has been focusing pretty much exclusively on flood insurance since the floods happened, and there are some policies that I read and re-read and still don’t understand what they’re on about.”



One little ray of sunshine was Suncorp Insurance, whose track record for paying claims after the same floods is laudable. Having researched flood risk and raised premiums accordingly, it was well-placed to pay out claims. RACV has also been making compassionate payments to hundreds of affected Victorian customers.

Smurfberry Surprise goes to

SMURFS' VILLAGE

Countless parents have been stung for hundreds of dollars for Smurfs' Village, a free game for the iPad, iPhone and now the Android platform. The idea of the game is to build up a village, which includes constructing buildings and bridges and growing gardens.

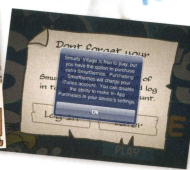
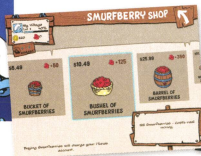
The sting lies in the substantial cost of in-app purchases. True, there’s a disclaimer pointing out “Smurfs' Village is free to play but charges real money for additional in-app content”, and additional warnings every time a purchase is offered. Trouble is, kids ignore it and parents are oblivious. So when little Johnny first asks for Dad’s iTunes password for a “free” app, Dad thinks, “why not?” and hands it over. When Johnny runs out of Smurfberries, required for in-game currency, he buys a truckload of them and Dad wonders why his iTunes account is clocking up massive bills. Okay, so in many cases the parents are culpable for giving kids the password.



However, the distinction between requests for real versus game money later in the game isn’t always clear to those kids to whom the game is marketed.

So can you play the game without in-app purchases? It’s not recommended, according to our expert iGamer, 13-year-old Will Kollmorgen. “They give you a small amount of Smurfberries for free to start off. After you use them up and really get into the game, you’ll need to pay for Smurfberries to keep adding things and expanding your Smurf world. If you don’t add things, it’s just not fun anymore.” Our in-house gamer confirmed that once you get to a certain level, things slow down unless you pay real money to speed them up again. At that point, he says, it’s not worth playing – but if you’re hooked, which apparently happens quite readily, you’ll pay to play.

We’ve seen a bill of more than \$400 for in-app purchases. Bills of more than \$1000 have been reported elsewhere. That’s a lot compared to conventional computer games, which typically cost \$50-\$100 one-off. Mmm, Smurfberries – they’re shonklicious!



It all started the usual miracle weight-loss product way: some positive plugs on prime time current affairs TV, a reference to a clinical trial, an endorsement by a white-coated doctor, a jockey suing for too much weight loss and "testimonials" from satisfied customers all ensured the SensaSlim Solution weight-loss spray raced off the shelves.

But some of the more contentious breaches of the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code caught the eye of Dr Ken Harvey, a public health physician and consumer representative for CHOICE. So he lodged a complaint with the regulatory authority, the Therapeutic Goods Administration's Complaints Resolution Panel (CRP).

Normally, the advertiser accepts an inevitable slap on the wrist from the regulator without fuss, ignores the sanctions as far as possible and gets back to business as usual, none the worse for wear. But SensaSlim decided to sue Ken for defamation.

Due to legislative technicalities, this meant the CRP couldn't adjudicate on the matter, because it was involved in legal proceedings. This caused no small amount of glee for SensaSlim, who stated in their internal newsletter: "This defamation action, which could be in the courts for a year or two or even longer, basically gives an iron-clad protection that nobody can raise a complaint against SensaSlim to the CRP and hurt us."

But the case became news, and contrary to popular belief, not all publicity is good publicity. Once some journalists started sniffing around, all sorts of interesting and embarrassing stuff emerged. For example, the Intercontinental Research Institute in Geneva, which did the clinical



trial, featured images of completely oblivious doctors from the US whose pictures were nicked off the internet. The clinical trial was apparently fabricated. No, really? The jockey suing for too much weight loss really had lost weight – almost a kilogram in half an hour. All thanks to SensaSlim? Er, no.

Then their own, apparently real, white-coated doctor disassociated himself from the company and the product. They also had their advertising approvals cancelled, though they more or less ignored this. Even current affairs TV turned on them, damning the dastardly scammers who not so long ago were weight-loss heroes.

In a hearing seeking to freeze the assets of the company, pending ACCC investigations into misleading conduct, it emerged that one of the principals was Peter Foster, whom you may remember from previous "ventures" including miracle weight-loss tea products, putting money through the washing machine and the Cherie Booth Blair property fiasco. The ACCC has subsequently applied for a

making snake oil look good goes to

SENSASLIM (AND FRIENDS)

20-year ban on Foster's corporate life, and lesser bans for other SensaSlim principals. With assets frozen, the company was placed into receivership.

Some franchisees, who've reportedly paid about \$60,000 for distribution rights, got the jitters. They wanted out – and their money back – and class-action lawyers Slater and Gordon came to their rescue. Meanwhile, an expert witness for the ACCC's case against SensaSlim reported being threatened in relation to the defamation case.

Ken eventually won his case and was awarded costs – a pyrrhic victory, because SensaSlim can't afford to pay. You'd think by now they'd have conceded defeat. But one of SensaSlim's directors has filed a defamation suit against Ken for defamation in Queensland. They're also launching a new product, called SensaSlim Slimming Spray, "in a pleasant vanilla flavour". And so the saga of shonkousity continues.

The TGA, which deserves an honorary Shonky for its role in this, has had ample reason and opportunity to de-list the product and ensure it can no longer be sold in Australia, but have declined to do so. Even after its own CRP recommended SensaSlim's de-listing due to its non-compliance with regulations, the administration has sat tight and done nothing. ■



Greetings from...



Bargain bites?

Dental bills can be more painful than the treatment, which is why some consumers are going abroad to save money. **Kate Browne** investigates.

There are few things in life worse than a trip to the dentist. Some might say the only thing worse is paying the bill. Worse yet, though, is not being able to afford to go at all.

As dental costs continue to rise, some people are choosing to travel overseas for treatment instead. With reported savings of up to 75% in some countries, it's not surprising a growing number of people are packing their bags to chase cheap dentistry overseas.

And if you're up for it, there are plenty of medical tourism agencies to help you on your way. Many offer a range of medical options – from cosmetic surgery to elective surgery, eye surgery and fertility treatment – while others specialise in one area such as dental. These agencies will organise your flights, accommodation and even

sightseeing (though not travel insurance should a procedure go wrong). They will provide advice on hospitals regarding their success rates and complications for treatment and whether they are accredited by organisations such as the International Organization for Standardizations or the Joint Commission International.

It all sounds pretty tempting, but is dental tourism too good to be true?

Sun, surf and scaling

India, Vietnam and Turkey are just some of the exotic global destinations on offer for medical tourism. For Australians, the most popular destinations for dental work are Malaysia and Thailand.

Bumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok sees 11,000 overseas visitors for dental treatment alone. Marketing Director

Kenneth Mays estimates that 500 to 600 of these patients are Australian. "We provide a complete dental centre, staffed by 55 full- and part-time dental specialists, 26 [of whom] trained and/or have been board-certified in the US, UK, Japan or Australia," he says. Patients are choosing to travel to Thailand, he explains, because of the lower cost for equivalent quality of care, combined with good treatment,

**650,
000**

**Australians are
currently on the public
dental waiting list**



impressed with the facilities. After receiving a quote they were even more impressed with the price – \$5500, a huge saving on the original quote.

As a result, the couple started a health travel service to Thailand. Sheriff says they've sent more than 160 clients overseas in the last year, 75% of whom were for dental. When she asks her clients why they're choosing overseas destinations for their dental care, the answer is always the same. "It's cost. We've seen people who've been quoted up to \$60,000 for substantial work and simply cannot afford to have it done in Australia. We now receive up to 20 enquiries a week, and most of these are from people wanting dental work."

service and value – and all in a desirable vacation location.

Barbara Sheriff, who owns Queensland travel agency My Body and Spirit, specialises in sending clients to Thailand for dental work, cosmetic surgery and laser eye surgery. She says the business came about as a result of her husband's dental woes. "He needed significant dental treatment and was quoted \$25,000, which was just far too much," Sheriff, a travel agent already familiar with Thailand, looked into having treatment there instead. She and her husband visited The Bangkok Hospital on the holiday island of Phuket and were

IF YOU STAY AT HOME...

Extras insurance will help pay for some dental costs, but it won't pay for everything.

Set up a fund If extras insurance is too costly, consider putting aside money each month for future dental costs. It takes discipline, but the alternative is far worse.

Check the details Serious oral and maxillofacial surgery may fall under your hospital insurance.

Look after your teeth Good preventative dental care will help avoid problems in the first place.



Cassandra Italia owns Global Health Travel, another agency that sends Australians to a variety of countries for healthcare. She also says dental requests are on the rise. "Dental is huge, and the driving factor is cost," she says. "Even if people have a holiday at the same time they will usually find they still come out better off financially."

The downside

The Australian Dental Association (ADA) acknowledges that dental tourism is on the rise but warns of the risks. "For a third of the price and a holiday at the same time it sounds like an offer that's too good to be true, but it isn't that good," says former Federal President Dr John Matthews. "Most people go overseas because they want fairly complex dentistry done, and the more complex it is the more likely that something will go wrong. And when it fails, it fails big time."

Dr Carmelo Bonanno, a Canberra dentist and Federal Executive of the ADA, says people need to understand the implications of taking their dental care offshore.

"Overseas dentists may or may not have the training and experience, but with your Australian dentist it is very clear. If you see me you know where I've been trained and

...OR GO ABROAD

Do your homework

Research online or try and visit the hospital beforehand. Look for reviews, or for places recommended by expatriates living in that country. Many hospitals provide background details on their dentists, including qualifications and where they trained.

Ask questions Ask for a full treatment plan and about the time frame as well as the total costs.

Make time Don't book an inflexible airfare or limited annual leave as you may need to stay longer than expected.

Accept that you may need to go back for more work and you may lose the savings you made initially.



that I'm registered, and if you're not happy with the work there are avenues to complain."

Bonanno says if people choose to head overseas, they may be in for unexpected additional costs. A former patient

of his chose to have cosmetic dentistry done in Asia that was so badly done it will take significant work and a lot more money to get it fixed at home.

While Bonanno says he understands dental costs can be expensive in Australia, he urges people to weigh up the risks of taking their treatment out of the safety net

provided here. "You might have work done that's absolutely fine, but what if it isn't? Fixing bad dentistry is no fun."

Home and away

The ADA says there are many reasons that Australians should avoid dental holidays. In a public document it cites issues including poor training and infection control. Time and continuity of care is another problem where dental treatment overseas is fitted in around a holiday, and should ideally be ▶

15%

of people on private health cover said they couldn't afford the out-of-pocket expenses

conducted over a longer period of time. And, of course, there's the risk of something going wrong. Most travel insurers will not cover medical tourism and it's unlikely there will be any suitable avenues for complaint.

In the other corner, the medical travel agents CHOICE spoke to say they've had no complaints from the customers they deal with and that they provide a full estimate of the time required for treatment before their clients even book a flight, as well as a high level of care in quality hospitals. "Our clients' cases and X-rays are reviewed by the head of dental in The Bangkok Hospital and all the details are put into place meticulously," says Sheriff.

While it's unfair to put all overseas dentists in the same category, Italia says she feels that detractors of medical tourism have a level of ignorance about the countries in question. "A lot of people in Australia have a perception that countries such as Thailand, Vietnam and India would have bad conditions in the hospitals, maybe slack

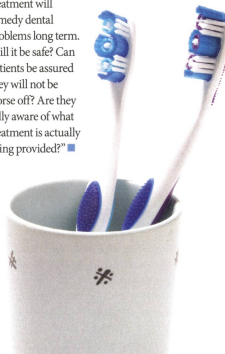
infection control and be very Third World. Certainly from my experience visiting the Bangkok and Bumrungrad hospitals, I didn't find this the case. Bumrungrad has a surgical site infection rate of only 0.39%, which is well below the worldwide benchmark."

Italia believes much of this talk is scaremongering by those wanting to keep their patients. She says many of her clients have been refused access to their dental records or X-rays by local dentists if they want them to take overseas. "We tell people to get a referral from a GP to see a radiologist in order to get the X-rays," says fellow agent Sheriff.

In the meantime, for patients who do decide to go overseas for treatment, the one thing all parties agree on is that if you do, you will be going it alone. It's unlikely you'll be able to get travel insurance, and with no clear avenues to complain if you aren't happy with the work, there are risks. Furthermore, the agencies that organise your treatment

and travel make it clear they're only providing the tools and information to allow the customer to make the final choice. Global Health Travel's website clearly states: "We will not encourage, advise, advocate or underwrite any of the doctors or healthcare facilities in our network. The final choice is completely yours."

The ADA states that "Australians must ask themselves [whether] the overseas treatment will remedy dental problems long term. Will it be safe? Can patients be assured they will not be worse off? Are they fully aware of what treatment is actually being provided?" ■



For patients who do decide to go overseas for treatment, the one thing all parties agree on is that if you do, you will be going it alone

Australia's dental crisis

Dental care in Australia is certainly not a pretty picture. At last count, up to 650,000 Australians were on public dental waiting lists. And of those who can supposedly afford it, plenty are struggling.

A recent report by IPSOS Australia revealed that almost two million people who needed to go to the dentist in the past two years had put it off because they couldn't afford it. Fifteen per cent of those with private health cover said they couldn't afford the out-of-pocket expenses. The report projects more than 3.5 million Australians have not visited a dentist in the past four years, and that cost issues are impacting those

in middle income households and starting to impact high-earning households as well.

Unfortunately, putting off treatment isn't the answer. In the long term, untreated dental problems can result in infections, abscesses and gum disease. Serious dental problems can also lead to malnutrition, and mouth infections can spread to lungs, blood and arteries. And then there's the social stigma of having missing or rotten teeth.

Several years ago, the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission recommended a universal dental health scheme, Denticare. But with an estimated cost of at least \$5 billion,

which was proposed to be raised largely by increasing the Medicare Levy, it will not be easy to get support for this.

The Greens are continuing to push for universal dental care, but both major parties have largely kept the issue off the agenda so far. "The high cost of dental care means that many Australians simply don't go to the dentist," says Greens senator and former GP Richard Di Natale. "Price is one of the biggest barriers, and the current situation cannot be allowed to continue. We need a health system in this country that looks after all Australians from tooth to toe."

DENTAL SAVINGS AND A HOLIDAY

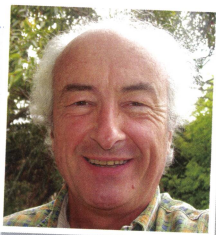
David Sanderson from Sydney recently travelled to Thailand for major dental surgery, including implants and a replacement crown. He says the prices quoted by his Australian dentist were so high he had no choice but to consider overseas options. "I'd used up my lifetime insurance limits for periodontic work and faced paying the entire amount."

David did his research before making a decision, going online for names of dentists and surgeries. He then trawled online discussion forums for recommendations, particularly those where expatriates discussed the best places. He settled on a dental

clinic in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, where he stayed for four weeks to have the work completed.

David is happy with the work, the standards at the clinic and the entire cost, which was less than half of what he was quoted in Australia. "I also believe my Thai dentists were more expert and knowledgeable than my Australian dentist. My Australian dentist recommended getting crowns on all my upper teeth, but my Thai one convinced me that was not advisable and also replaced my broken crown with a type that was likely to be more durable."

However, David says it's important to research before choosing a clinic.



"There were other clinics I saw that I wouldn't recommend. Find out if the clinic you've chosen has a good reputation and be prepared to pay more for higher quality – you'll still be getting a bargain."

Dental at home and a big bill

A recent check-up with my dentist left me spinning, and it wasn't from the gas. Just 18 months after my last visit, the prognosis wasn't good. A pregnancy with severe morning sickness had taken its toll. It turns out that vomiting every day for nine months is not only revolting but isn't great for your teeth either. The result? Acid damage and cavities, which required nine new fillings. To make matters worse, I also needed root canal work and a crown.

The estimated out-of-pocket cost after my private health care cover was more than \$6000. In a family of four with just one working member (I was on maternity leave), an unexpected \$6000 bill isn't welcome. Having travelled to Thailand before,

I researched it as an option. A return fare to Bangkok at the time was about \$869, accommodation in a basic hotel was \$378 for three weeks and the same dental work at a well-known international hospital was estimated

at \$1800. Throw in a little spending money and time in one of my favourite cities, and I still would've been almost \$3000 better off.

The only thing that stopped me from jumping on a plane was my toddler, baby and a husband who might not forgive me for leaving him with the kids while I flew halfway around the world for about a month. As a result, I reluctantly took the local option, and while the work was excellent, several months later I am still paying off the bill.

KATE BROWNE

The estimated out-of-pocket cost after my private health care cover was more than \$6000

Kate Browne reluctantly chose to stay in Australia for her dental work

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Squeezing home

Compression sportswear is everywhere, but can it really improve performance? **Karina Bray** finds out.

Sport is big business, and there is plenty of money out there to fund the hunt for that extra edge. Compression wear – from Skins, BSC, 2XU and other brands – is all the rage, and lots of people are willing to pay a high price for the perceived boost to performance and recovery. But does it really help?

Better performance

There are several ways compression garments could enhance sporting performance: by increasing blood flow and oxygen availability in muscles; reducing muscle oscillation (vibration); and increasing proprioception (awareness of the position of your joints in space). They may also make you more aerodynamic. These effects could result in faster times, increased strength, greater endurance and/or more skilful play.

Unfortunately, while the theoretical effects have been shown in trials, this hasn't always translated into better performance. The best outcomes appear to be for jumping, and positive effects on sprinting and cycling have also been reported. But other studies have found no difference in performance or speed

for ball-throwing, sprinting, cycling and long-distance running.

Preventing and managing injury

Injury prevention hasn't been specifically studied in trials, but there are several theoretical mechanisms for prevention. By reducing muscle oscillation, it's thought that compression garments may reduce stress injuries. Better proprioception could also reduce your risk of injury by indicating when your body has reached its limits – so you don't over-extend joints, for example.

Compression garments may be useful for people with certain existing injuries by providing support to minimise undesired movement of underlying tissues. A

physiotherapist is best placed to determine whether they'll help in a particular situation.

Compression garments increase skin temperature but not core body temperature, so wearing them does not replace warming up before exercise.

Enhanced recovery

To get the full benefits for recovery, the garments must be worn during and after exercise for at least several hours, for up to 24 hours. If they're worn during exercise only they won't have much effect on recovery. A few studies show improvement in recovery to pre-exercise levels, but others don't. More studies show improvements in perceptual recovery – that is, people feel better after having worn them, reporting less muscle soreness and fatigue. However, the most important factors in recovery are sleep, nutrition and hydration.

The upshot

The rationale for wearing compression garments is solid, but the evidence is weak. Though many studies have been done on compression wear, the findings are mixed and may also vary between individuals. While some find physiological benefits, such as augmented blood flow, increased muscle oxygenation, decreased lactic acid build-up and decreased muscle oscillation, the theoretical benefits from this don't translate to noticeable performance benefits.

For the average fun-runner or keen amateur sportsperson, there are probably more effective ways of improving performance, preventing injury and enhancing recovery. However, many people love the feel of the material and the pressure on their skin, as well as the feeling of support and reduced "wobble".

Anecdotally, many people find they receive a performance boost and that they feel better afterwards.

So, if you think they work, then they do work. Given there's no evidence of negative effects, if they feel good and put you in a sporting frame of mind, we go for it. ■

Buy on fit and price

Studies suggest there's no particular stand-out brand. This was confirmed by an expert who has tested a variety of cheap and top-of-the-range brands. The main thing is that they feel comfortable – tight but not too tight.

The dirt on antibacterials

Emily McCluskey looks beyond the health hype surrounding antibacterial cleaners and sanitisers.



Nutshell

➤ Antibacterial cleaners are a popular choice in the battle against bacteria.

➤ In and around the home, antibacterial products are no more effective than soap and water.

If you believe the advertising, every home should be bristling with an arsenal of antibacterial sprays, gels, wipes and washes. Consumers are being told they need to eliminate germs from their homes to protect themselves and their

families. Antibacterial products, we're told, will save us from sickness.

A 1999-2000 survey in the US found 75% of all liquid hand soaps and almost 30% of all bar soaps contained antibacterial agents – and our survey of Australian supermarkets confirmed they are still prevalent in handwashing products. Antibacterials such as triclosan (see page 28) are now being added to pillows, mattresses, food storage containers and household fittings. The effort may be well-intentioned, but could the overuse of antibacterial products be doing more harm than good?

Battle of the bugs

We live in a bacterial bath – but not all the slithering microbes should be wiped

out. Some bacteria keep us healthy by keeping harmful bacteria in check. When we bombard them indiscriminately with antibacterials, we disrupt the balance between good and bad. Worse, we may end up giving the bad bugs the upper hand.

Antibacterial agents don't care which bacteria they kill, and that can have serious consequences.

"The mechanism for disturbing good versus bad bacteria has to do with selection," says Dr Stuart Levy, Director of the Center for Adaptation Genetics and Drug Resistance at Tufts University School of Medicine in the US. "The [antibacterial] products inhibit growth of susceptible and

harmless strains of bacteria while not affecting resistant strains that may be infectious."

Vive la resistance

It's this selective process that has scientists worried, since studies under laboratory conditions have demonstrated that it's possible to use antibacterials to create antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Along with the overuse of antibiotics, the extensive use of handwashing products and cleaners containing biocides could contribute to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant strains and ultimately reduce the efficacy of prescription antibiotics. If antibacterials are included in consumer products at sub-lethal concentrations, for instance, they create the perfect environment for the evolution of resistant strains.

While evidence that using antibacterials causes antibiotic resistance has only been borne out in the lab, some scientists such as Levy believe it's fair to assume that the

lift dirt off the skin and other surfaces so dirt and bacteria can be easily rinsed away. Washing with soap and water will reduce the amount of bacteria to safe levels without the use of an antibacterial agent. In fact, scientists have demonstrated that washing hands with plain old soap is just as effective at reducing bacterial load as washing with antibacterial soap. And, this time-honoured approach has the added bonus of not disturbing the balance of good and bad bacteria.

What's more, many studies have shown that the use of antibacterials does not reduce infection rates in healthy households. Partly because of a well-established fact that product makers don't mention in their marketing, many of the common illnesses you need to worry about are caused by viruses, not bacteria. Keeping these facts in mind, it's fair to say that antibacterials do little beyond what soap and water can do.

Antibacterial agents don't care which bacteria they kill, and that can have serious consequences

antibacterial cleaners we use at home are a significant contributor to the development of superbugs — antibiotic-resistance bacteria.

"Antibacterials should be limited to use in healthcare settings, where they are used under optimal conditions to protect against infection," he says, adding that antibacterial use in the home may make them less effective in healthcare environments, where they are needed most.

Suds stack up

Another good reason to limit antibacterials to healthcare is that many of the products we find in the supermarket are no more effective than soap and water. Regardless of whether they're contributing to antibiotic resistance, there's a strong case to be made that they're targeting a need that's already met.

Although soap doesn't actually kill all bacteria, what it does do quite effectively is

The allergy link

Dirt may not be such a bad thing after all. Health scientists have suggested that our war on bacteria may be partially responsible for the increase in rhinitis and allergic asthma in children. Based on studies showing a lower incidence of allergic disease in children who grow up in large families, attend childcare or have pets, the current consensus is that exposure to microbes as a child plays an important role in regulating the immune system. In other words it may reduce the body's tendency to develop allergic reactions to common allergens.

So, overuse of antibacterials in your home may not only contribute to the problem of antibiotic resistance, but also add to the likelihood of your child developing allergies. ▶



75%

of all liquid hand soaps in the US contain antibacterial agents

30%

of all bar soaps in the US contain antibacterial agents

Common antibacterial agents to look for on the back of household products are triclosan, hydrogen peroxide, benzalkonium chloride, chlorine, iodine, chlorhexadine and cetylpyridium chloride.

Safe sanitising

- Choose a sanitiser with 60%-80% alcohol. Use soap and water first if your hands are visibly soiled.
- Apply the amount recommended by the manufacturer and rub hands together, coating all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing until the hands are dry. If it takes less than 15 seconds to dry, then you haven't applied enough.

Triclosan – the household pesticide

One of the most common antibacterials to be added to household products is triclosan (or triclocarban). You may find it if you look at the ingredients list on your liquid or bar soaps or toothpaste. Triclosan is a highly effective agent against harmful organisms, but there is concern that it could also pose a risk to our health and the environment. Animal studies have indicated that it may be an endocrine disruptor as it interferes with both thyroid and sex hormones. Since humans have similar hormone systems to other animals, these chemicals may also be affecting us in similar ways.

About three-quarters of Americans have triclosan in their urine. It has also been detected in human blood and breast milk, and blood levels spike

after using antibacterial soaps and toothpaste containing the chemical.

After you use soap and toothpaste, most of the product goes down the sink where it enters the environment and waterways. As triclosan has been found in earthworms and waterways there is concern that it could enter the food supply.

If you're concerned about triclosan, check the ingredients lists of your soaps and toothpaste before buying

In light of the animal studies, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is currently reviewing the safety of triclosan in consumer products. The FDA's current stance is that there isn't sufficient evidence to change the use of the chemical in consumer products at this time. The report is due for release next year.

Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration says it's aware of the review, and "if significant new information on the adverse health effects of triclosan becomes available" there will be a "reassessment of

CHOICE verdict

While antibacterial soaps and cleaners are needed in a healthcare setting, they provide little benefit in our homes. Next time you're in the cleaning products aisle and looking for a germ eradicator, take a moment to consider the ingredients of what you buy. Antibacterials have their place in certain circumstances, but as they're no better than soap and water, why take the chance that using them might be contributing to antibiotic resistance or reducing their effectiveness in hospitals? Not buying them can save you a few dollars, too.

the chemical to determine if any additional controls are required to mitigate identified risks".

In the meantime, if you're concerned about triclosan, check the ingredients list of your soaps and toothpaste before buying. ■

Hand sanitisers under the pump

Alcohol hand sanitisers are a popular way of cleaning while out and about, but if used incorrectly (see page 27), they may be giving you a false sense of cleanliness.

Hand Hygiene Australia supports the use of alcohol-based hand rubs as an effective alternative to soap and water for healthcare settings where preventing the spread of infection is critical. But the type and level of dirt that an individual comes into contact with is different to what a healthcare professional encounters, and this can have an impact on how effective hand sanitisers are. They won't be appropriate if your hands are visibly soiled, and water will reduce the effectiveness of a hand rub, so they

may not be the best choice if you are handling food or if your hands are wet.

Many consumer hand sanitisers contain either ethanol or isopropyl alcohol. Some products do not state the alcohol content, which must be between 60% and 80% to be effective. Most of these products claim to kill 99.9% of germs, but the accuracy of this claim is highly dependent on the ingredients and how the product is used. "People should read product information carefully – the devil is always in the detail," says Brett Mitchell from Infection Control Australia. "Contact time is important."

Alcohol sanitisers do not protect you from everything. *Clostridium difficile*, for example, is responsible for many instances of diarrhoea and its spores

are not affected by alcohol-based rubs, so prevention requires soap, water and scrubbing.

Hand sanitisers should only be used as an optional follow-up to hand washing. But they're better than nothing if you don't have access to soap and water.



Battle of the booze

Australian and New Zealand sauvignon blancs and pinot noirs go head to head in this year's wine taste test. **Rachel Clemons** reports.

Australia and New Zealand have a long history of friendly rivalry. We argue over the origin of the pavlova. We both claim actor Russell Crowe as our own (when it suits, anyway). And when it comes to sport – well, it's probably best not to mention the rugby...

If it's something we both do well, we either fight to claim it or be acclaimed for it. Given that winemaking is something both countries excel at, CHOICE decided a good, old-fashioned head to head was in order for this year's wine taste test. We took 30 sauvignon blancs and 30 pinot noirs, half each from New Zealand and Australia, and pitted them against each other in a blind taste test. See How We Test, page 32, for details.

Overall in our test, there were twice as many wine show medal-standard wines

from across the ditch (24) as there were Australian (12). However, the average score for all the Australian wines compared with the New Zealand wines was about the same, indicating good consistency from the Australian wines on test.

Of course, our results are unlikely to resolve any rivalry. For those Aussies and Kiwis wishing to continue the debate, we suggest you do it over a glass of wine, a tasty meal and with great company and make it a pleasurable experience – the way all good wine should be enjoyed! ▶

Meet the experts

1. **Phillip Gregory** chaired our tasting and works for specialist importer Pinot NOW.
2. **Gavin Lennard** is Cellar Club Director for Wine Ark Cellar Club.
3. **Ross McCann** works for specialist wine importer Vintage and Vine.
4. **Andrea Pritzker** is the Content Manager for Langton's Wine Auctions.
5. **Paul Rogers** is a wine lawyer, educator and judge.



Pinot noir

A sublime pinot noir is the holy grail of wines, not least because of the difficulty growing this varietal. It's sensitive to wind and frost, soil types and pruning techniques. The grapes are susceptible to fungal diseases and the vines to mildew. In the winery it's sensitive to fermentation methods. Just two per cent of all wine drunk in Australia is pinot noir, but it seems Aussie drinkers are increasingly embracing the local talent, with two in three pinot noirs drunk in Australia produced here. And from 2009 to 2010, there was a 26% increase in pinot noir grapes crushed – despite overall Australian winegrape crush being down 12% on the 2009 figure. Elegance and complexity are desirable characteristics. A good pinot has an enticing nose with a silky, velvet mouth feel and a fresh, persistent finish. Fruit and complex developed characters should dominate, with acid, tannin, oak or stemmy characters in a supporting role only.

2 in 3

pinot noirs we drink
are domestically
produced*

4 in 5

sauvignon blancs we
drink are imported
from New Zealand*

Sauvignon blanc

New Zealand's Marlborough region is synonymous with this varietal. In the early 1990s its exuberant and intense sauvignon blancs put New Zealand on the international wine map, and their popularity doesn't seem to be waning – four in five sauv blancs we drink in Australia are imported across the Tasman. It's not surprising that two of the top three sauv blancs on test are from New Zealand. While sauv blanc is only the sixth-most crushed Australian variety (behind shiraz, chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, merlot and semillon), it represents a sizeable 13% of all wine consumed here. And while each of these top five varieties declined in terms of percentage of total tonnes crushed from 2009 to 2010, sauvignon blanc increased by 15% over the same period. Compared with the traditional NZ style, Aussie sauv blancs tend to be less tropical and more grassy, less vibrant and more subtle. ▶

TOP PINOT NOIRS



17.8 Dog Point Vineyard 2009, \$40.50 Marlborough, NZ

Tasting notes "Attractive strawberry aromatics with earthy/spicy overtones. The palate exhibits an abundance of ripe strawberry fruit with a lovely opulent mouth feel and velvety tannins. This is a bigger styled pinot noir, yet all the elements are held together in a fine balance."

Andrea Pritzker



17.1 Paringa Estate Estate 2008, \$65.99 Mornington Peninsula, Aus

Tasting notes "Very dark cherry colour, a real 'peacock tail' of a complex fusion of flavours of red and black berries. Velvet length and smooth finish. An excellent food wine and will develop over two to three years."

Paul Rogers



17 Mud House 2009, \$22.99 Central Otago, NZ

Tasting notes "Medium red with a light rim. Good fruit intensity with rhubarb and spices. Well balanced in the mouth, rounded mouthfeel, luscious and complex with good length of palate."

Phillip Gregory



17 Tamar Ridge Kayena Vineyard 2009, \$27.99 Northern Tasmania, Aus

Tasting notes "Youthful red violet, good density. Dark berry and cherry aromas, hints of cedary oak and beetroot. Taut, restrained palate, showing excellent concentration of ripe fruit and savoury nuance. Finishes with great length, fine grained, silky tannin and bright acidity."

Gavin Lennard

TOP SAUVIGNON BLANCS



17.5

Shaw & Smith
2011, \$29.99
Adelaide Hills, Aus

Tasting notes "This wine has lifted aromas of ripe passionfruit and gooseberry on the palate. It's fresh and zesty, with well-defined tropical fruit/passionfruit notes, excellent intensity and length. This is a benchmark example of sauvignon blanc, perfect for enjoying with antipasti or seafood."

Andrea Pritzker

17.3

Stoneleigh
2010, \$19.99
Marlborough, NZ

Tasting notes "Pale straw colour. Fresh, herbaceous and grassy on the nose – opened up with time in the glass. Clean, with good fruit intensity, acid and grapefruit characters in the mouth. Overall, a good example, being fresh, complex with a clean and persistent finish."

Phillip Gregory

17

Monkey Bay
2010, \$13.99
Marlborough, NZ

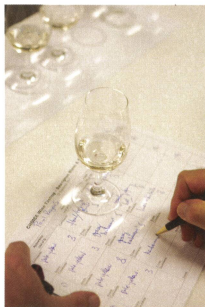
Tasting notes "Pale to medium straw. A balance between herbaceous characters and ripe peach. The herbal notes on the palate supply an interesting contrast to the ripe flavours, giving a refreshing mouthfeel. Good length."

Ross McCann

SAUVIGNON BLANCS

	Region	Vintage	Price (\$)	Overall score (out of 20)
Shaw & Smith	Adelaide Hills	2011	29.99	17.5
Stonleigh	Marlborough, NZ	2010	19.99	17.3
Monkey Bay	Marlborough, NZ	2010	13.99	17
Wither Hills	Marlborough, NZ	2010	15.99	16.7
Astrolabe Voyage	Marlborough, NZ	2010	21.99	16.5
Brancott Estate	Marlborough, NZ	2010	14.99	16.5
Hardys Nottage Hill	McLaren Vale	2011	6.90	16.4
Cloudy Bay	Marlborough, NZ	2010	38.99	16.1
Tangaroa	Marlborough, NZ	2010	7.99	16.1
Jacobs Creek	Barossa Valley	2011	9.99	15.8
Villa Maria Private Bin	Marlborough, NZ	2010	15.99	15.8
Oyster Bay	Marlborough, NZ	2011	15.99	15.7
Amiri	Marlborough, NZ	2010	6.99	15.6
Rosemount Estate Diamond Label	McLaren Vale	2010	10.99	15.6
Seven°	Marlborough, NZ	2010	9.90	15.5
Wirra Wirra Hiding Champion	Adelaide Hills	2011	19.99	15.5
Baily & Baily Legs Eleven	South Eastern Australia	2010	9.99	15.4
Geoff Weaver Lenswood	Adelaide Hills	2011	22.99	15.3
Stella Bella	Margaret River	2010	21.99	15.3
Howard Park	Margaret River/Denmark	2010	22.99	15.1
Secret Stone	Marlborough, NZ	2010	14.99	15.1
Ashbrook Estate	Margaret River	2011	22.99	15
Leeuwin Estate Art Series	Margaret River	2010	27.99	15
Lindeman's Bin 95	Murray Darling	2010	6.99	15
McGuigan Black Label	Hunter Valley	2010	11.99	15
Wolf Blass Eaglehawk	Barossa Valley	2010	6.99	15
Gunn Estate	Marlborough, NZ	2011	9.99	14.8
Giesen The Brothers	Marlborough, NZ	2009	22.99	14.7
Yalumba The Y Series	Eden Valley	2010	9.99	14.7
Nobilo Regional Collection	Marlborough, NZ	2010	15.99	14.2

USING THE TABLE Prices are the shelf price when we purchased the wines in Sydney liquor stores in September 2011.



How we test

The wine selection is based on those most commonly bought at Allied Liquor Merchants and Woolworths. We've also included wines recommended by wine experts and CHOICE members. Equal numbers of sauvignon blancs and pinot noirs from Australia and New Zealand were selected. We ensured that the price range of the wines representing each country was similar for each variety.

Our expert tasters [see Meet the Experts, page 29] are trained to judge wines on their merits, setting aside personal preferences. The wines are tasted blind, identified only by numbers. Each expert independently gives the wines a score out of 20, following the international show scoring system for wines – a maximum of three for appearance, seven for nose (aroma) and 10 for palate.

The score published in the tables is a consensus score reached when the experts discuss the wine after tasting, still without knowing the wines. A score less than 15.5 points indicates the wine is OK but nothing special. One that scores 15.5 to 16.9 points would be awarded a bronze medal at a wine show, 17 to 18.4 points would earn a silver and 18.5 or more a gold. ■

Views on vintage

Wine vintage plays an important role in the quality of wine. When faced with a choice of vintages for a particular wine, or if you're buying from a region and want to know which year was a good one, try the following resources:

- James Halliday's vintage chart rates the quality of the vintage in each Australian wine region. See winecompanion.com.au/wine-essentials/australian-vintage-chart.
- Langton's vintage chart provides ratings for 53 of Australia's leading regional varieties. See langtons.com.au/Tools/VintageChart.aspx.

37%
of alcohol consumed
in 2009-10 was wine**

69.1%
of all wine imports
are from New
Zealand**

PINOT NOIRS

	Region	Vintage	Price (\$)	Overall score (out of 20)
Dog Point Vineyard	Marlborough, NZ	2009	40.50	17.8
Paringa Estate Estate	Mornington Peninsula	2008	65.99	17.1
Mud House	Central Otago, NZ	2009	22.99	17
Tamar Ridge Kayena Vineyard	Northern Tasmania	2009	27.99	17
Coldstream Hills	Yarra Valley	2010	27.99	16.9
De Bortoli Gulf Station	Yarra Valley	2010	15.99	16.6
Peregrine	Central Otago, NZ	2008	49.99	16.6
Secret Stone	Marlborough, NZ	2010	21.99	16.6
Brancott Estate Terraces	Marlborough, NZ	2009	21.99	16.4
Ata Rangi	Martinborough, NZ	2009	69.99	16.3
Villa Maria Cellar Selection	Marlborough, NZ	2009	46.99	16.2
Martinborough Vineyard Te Ter	Martinborough, NZ	2010	25.00	16.1
Bream Creek	Southern Tasmania	2009	34.99	15.9
Pegasus Bay	Canterbury, NZ	2008	52.99	15.9
Stonier	Mornington Peninsula	2009	23.99	15.9
Gembrook Hill	Yarra Valley	2008	51.99	15.8
Oyster Bay	Marlborough, NZ	2010	17.99	15.8
Maude	Central Otago, NZ	2008	34.99	15.7
Felton Road Bannockburn	Central Otago, NZ	2010	59.99	15.5
Palliser Estate	Martinborough, NZ	2008	39.99	15.5
Innocent Bystander	Yarra Valley	2010	19.99	15.4
Tyrrell's Wines Old Winery	South Eastern Australia	2010	13.99	15.4
Bannockburn	Geelong	2008	52.99	15.3
By Farr Sangreal	Geelong	2009	73.50	15.3
Yabby Lake Vineyard Single Vineyard	Mornington Peninsula	2009	59.99	15.2
Quartz Reef	Central Otago, NZ	2007	45.99	15.1
Craggy Range Zebra Vineyard	Central Otago, NZ	2007	49.99	14.9
Curly Flat	Macedon Ranges	2008	48.00	14.8
Port Phillip Estate	Mornington Peninsula	2009	31.99	14.8
Taylors	Adelaide Hills	2010	15.00	14.8

USING THE TABLE Prices are the shelf price when we purchased the wines in Sydney liquor stores in September 2011.

** SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS (FIGURES ARE BY VOLUME)



Ethical dilemmas

Old-school ethical investing has given way to concentrating more on how companies are run rather than what they do, finds **Andy Kollmorgen**.

As the global economy expands, so too does the definition of ethical investing. The best-performing Australian-based fund over a 15-year period turns out to be in the ethical/socially responsible sector, and it draws the line at weapons, nuclear power, gambling, intensive animal farming and cosmetic testing on animals. However animal by-products, alcohol and mining companies are fair game, although uranium is ruled out.

The fund in question is Hunter Hall's Value Growth Trust, which boasted a 10.3% net annual return as of July last year. Hunter Hall is Australia's largest firm in the sector and was named the *Money Management*/Lonsec ethical fund manager of the year in May for its Global Ethical Trust fund, which showed a 4.6% return.

Hunter Hall operates within ethical guidelines it has set itself, which industry analyst Lonsec describes as having a

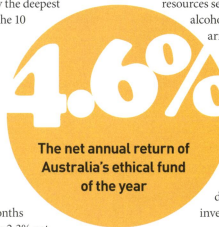
"small number of excluded industries" targeted toward investors with a "light to moderate ethical motivation".

The price of profitability

The ethical stance is more restrictive for Australian Ethical, a firm that "continues to apply the deepest ethical hurdle" of the 10 ethical/socially responsible investment funds Lonsec analysed. In the analysis, Australian Ethical's Larger Companies Trust was the weakest performer in the Australian ethical sector in the 12 months to June 2010, with a 2.3% net return on investment. The result is not surprising, given Australian Ethical says it avoids the best-of-sector approach

some fund managers employ in order to reap profits that may come with ethical question marks.

The strongest performer, Perpetual's Wholesale Ethical SRI Fund (a 29% net return in the same period) steers clear of most of the profitable energy and resources sectors, while allowing alcohol, tobacco, gaming, armaments and uranium – as long as they don't make up more than five per cent of a company's business. Of these, Hunter Hall only permits alcohol, while Australian Ethical doesn't list any as investment areas.



The thin green line

In today's investment environment, greener doesn't always mean leaner. ▶

In fact, in recent years, having a shade of green in your portfolio has paid off. The ethical/socially responsible sector in Australia and New Zealand rose a robust 10% in 2009-10, from \$14.02 billion to \$15.41 billion – more than the market for portfolios that aren't ethically exclusive.

The big earnings may be because the ethical line has blurred since CHOICE last looked at the sector in 2007. For one thing, we've had a global financial crisis, and more and more businesses have been swallowed up by multinational conglomerates. The way is cloudier than ever for investors with an exacting sense of right and wrong.

"The old-school, negative screening approach to ethical investing is strictly about avoiding investments in bad companies," Lonsec senior investment analyst, Steven Sweeney, told us. "You weed out the baddies according to the products they make or sell, such as weapons. The sector has now largely evolved to include funds that fall into the category of sustainable investing.

With this approach, companies such as BHP and Rio Tinto that would have once been strictly hands-off for ethical investors might now be looked at with an eye to how they compensate for any negative impact."

As Lonsec pointed out in its *Responsible Sector Investment Review*, released in September last year, "the market seems to have less appetite for funds focused solely on avoiding corporate bad guys compared to those investing in sustainable companies."

The ING Sustainable Investment Wholesale Australian Share Trust, the BT Wholesale Australian Sustainable Share Fund and the ethical/socially responsible funds managed by AMP, for example, are particularly focused on seeking out companies with a good sustainability record – also described as those that adhere to good environment, social and governance practices.

But ethical approaches in general are not something you can fit neatly in a box. Hunter Hall acknowledges the ethical line can shift, saying "borderline cases arise where it is unclear whether a potential investment should be rejected or not" and that "the perception

2%
The size of the ethical proportion of the Australian investment market

10.3%
The recent annual return for one of Australia's leading ethical funds

of the ethicality of many activities is likely to be subject to revision as circumstances change".

Oversight

Hunter Hall, Australian Ethical, Perpetual and others are all members of the Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA). The peak body created a certification program in partnership with the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation and the Victorian Government in 2005 with a view to uniform standards for disclosure for funds.

In order to qualify, fund managers must make a convincing case to RIAA that they have a specific methodology in place to weed out unethical behaviour. The process is then independently verified by the accounting firm Grant Thornton. These funds carry an RIAA certification symbol.

Hunter Hall says it continually monitors the companies that make up its funds and jettisons those that fall short of its ethical standards. Vigilance is critical, according to its Media Manager, Bronwyn Delaney. "We hate greenwashing as much as everyone else – it's a big green Trojan horse."

The Hunter Hall portfolios are reviewed annually by an outside consultant, Delaney says, a process

The theory is that companies who do less harm, look after their employees, and are well managed will provide better returns

Shop talk

The ethical investing climate has changed since the GFC and spawned a new lexicon. Ethical investing Companies and sectors are negatively screened and not included in

portfolios if they make or sell certain products. Positive screening can also be part of the process. **Socially responsible investing** Companies are generally screened out if they take part in excluded activities but may be included if their



The age of ESG

The biggest ethical shift in the past few years, however, has been the increasing dominance of the sustainable approach, or environmental, social and governance risk management (ESG). In essence, it means fund managers look at how companies are run and how they manage the environment and social impact of their activities when evaluating their investment worthiness, rather than looking strictly at ethical factors. The theory is that companies who do less harm, look after their staff and are well managed will provide better returns.

For RIAA, the rapid expansion of the ESG approach is an opportunity to bring all investments under an ethical umbrella, bound together by the universal goal of seeking higher returns. It's a shift in thinking the organisation believes has been wrongfully left out of current government initiatives in the financial sector, in particular the Future of Financial Advice reforms (see *CHOICE*, August 2011).

RIAA director Greg Chipman told us that the consideration of ESG issues "should be a common denominator for all investment strategies. This applies whether we're talking about financial advisors, investment managers, superannuation funds or those offering

consumers some form of ethical or personal values based overlay".

Applying a universal approach that's simultaneously driven by profit and ethically conscious is particularly critical, RIAA says, since ethical funds that rely strictly on screening make up less than 2% of the consumer market.

The black list

Hunter Hall draws strict ethical lines around its most restrictive fund. In addition to investments that are off limits for all the firm's portfolios, the Hunter Hall Global Deep Green Trust rules out investments relating to companies doing business in regions with a record of human rights abuses, including the Tibetan and Xinjiang regions of China, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Libya, Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The fund will also not invest in companies based in countries that support commercial whaling, including Japan, Norway, Iceland, Denmark and South Korea.

Other firms certified by the Responsible Investments Association of Australasia have their own screening processes.



that "can result in a company being marked for disposal". (The most recent review was conducted by independent research organisation CAER.) The consultant audits the portfolios according to ethical guidelines that are specific to Hunter Hall, rather than a sector-wide set of criteria.

"Hunter Hall is willing to tolerate a small amount of controlled animal testing, if it is for the benefit of medical research," Delaney concedes, adding that labour standards are not included in the main screening process, but the firm "has a policy not to invest in companies that derive revenues from activities that violate human rights, therefore a company with very low labour standards may be filtered out anyway".

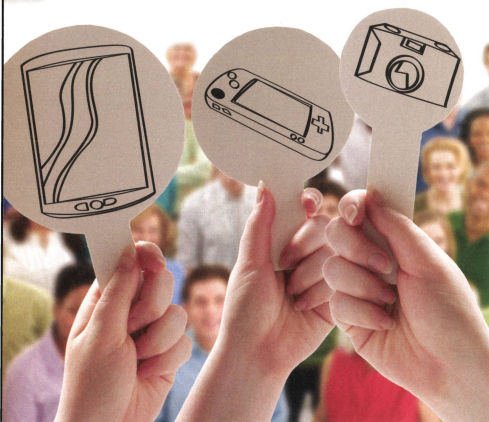
commitment to social responsibility outweighs the negative aspects.

Sustainable investing investments are chosen on the basis of how well a company manages environmental, social and governance factors, not what the company makes or sells.

CHOICE verdict

As the definition of an ethical investment portfolio has become harder to pin down, the need for investors to exercise their own due diligence has increased. Some funds include companies that engage in what are generally considered unethical activities as long as the activities take up no more than 5% or 10% of the company's interests. Fund

managers should be committed to transparency and invite investors to take a look at each fund and make their own judgments about whether they want to participate. With full disclosure at hand, it may end up being a trade-off between ethical considerations and financial ones. Which fund has the right ethical mix for you depends on what factors are important to you. ■



Penny pincher

Zoya Sheftalovich delves into the murky world of online penny auctions.

What if we told you there's a website where you can buy an iPad for \$34? It's not a fake – it's new and shiny and made by Apple. And that Nintendo Wii your kids have been bugging you for? You could be lucky enough to get it delivered for about \$24. It comes with a warranty and hasn't fallen off the back of any truck.

Tempted? So are we.

When CHOICE received several Shonky nominations (see page 16) for websites such as DealFun and BidFun, we were perplexed. On the surface they looked like legitimate online auction sites similar to eBay. But instead of paying hundreds of dollars for expensive electronics, bidders were winning items at ridiculously low prices. A \$30 iTunes gift card went for under \$2, and a Sony HD camcorder for less than \$30. So what's the catch?

How they work

There are many penny auction sites out there, but they generally all work the same way.

In order to participate, you must first buy a pack of bids (usually costing somewhere between 60c and \$1 per bid). Every time you place one of these bids in an auction, the price of the product being bid for increases by a tiny increment – usually 2c – and the auction extends by about 10 to 20 seconds. When the clock runs out and no bids are placed to extend it, the last bidder wins and pays the final price, usually significantly cheaper than the recommended retail. But unless you're the last bidder, you lose out not only on the item but also all the money you've contributed in unsuccessful bids.

In practice, auctions for popular items such as iPads can go on for days, creeping

up cent by cent. And with each cent, someone is essentially contributing up to \$1 towards the item – the super-cheap deal at the end is subsidised by those who don't win the item after all. We estimate that the \$34 iPad worked out to be a \$1734 boon for the auction operator.

"It sounds great, but isn't – it's a waste of time and money," one reader told CHOICE. "[It] costs you a fortune to buy bids and you use a hell of a lot more bids than you would think you need. Add to that, the time you have to spend on the computer just hoping you are online at the right time."

The trouble is there's no right time, because there are plenty of people willing to give up a night or two of sleep for the ultimate prize of a cheap gadget. And in at least one case we noticed, although the website had local domain names, they are just different interfaces for the same auction. So you may think you're only bidding against other Australians, but people around the world have their eye on that Nintendo DS too. Some sites don't even bother to convert currencies between Canadian, Australian and New Zealand dollars, suggesting that the actual price paid at the end of the auction is a negligible portion of the website's earnings.

Getting hooked

Time likened participating in these auctions to doing drugs: "For anybody who finds a bargain even mildly stimulating, this is like pure heroin. In recessionary times, it's like heroin that will also save puppies."

And these sites work hard to get you hooked. The flashing signs, urgent countdown timers and testimonials from successful auction winners are very tantalising. One site, Quibids, parades some of their highest winners on their front page. "Brian T saved \$8800", it proclaims. "Sandy M saved \$4112!"

Teacher and CHOICE member Vicki Northey was one of those taken in by the puff. "I wanted an iPhone, so I searched for it on Google and I saw this really cheap



price come up – it was just \$12 at auction,” she says. “But in order to bid I had to buy points, and the more you buy the cheaper they are, so I started with \$100. After I spent it all I thought, ‘Well I’ve been bidding on this for a long time, I’ve got to be close.’ So I bought another \$20 worth.”

Vicki soon regretted her decision to take a punt. “You think you’re just about to win – you’ve got the highest bid, and then at the last second someone puts in another bid and the clock goes back for another 20 seconds. This goes on and on and on.

“I realised I wasn’t going to win, and I’d wasted \$100–\$150. I went to school the next day and felt like an absolute fool, but I spoke with another teacher and found out she’d fallen for it too! But she said she had invested so much, she was just going to keep going. She won in the end, but paid the same amount in bids as she would have paid in store.”

“It’s worse than the pokies,” says Greg James, a concerned CHOICE member who nominated one such site for a Shonky. “I do a lot of online shopping on eBay and other sites around the world, and DealFun was cropping up advertising iPhones and iPads at 80% off,” he says. “So I signed up on a basic package of 150 bids for \$65 just to see how it works.

“They’re throwing a lot of money into search terms [to ensure they appear at the top of Google] to attach their advertising to iPhone and iPad searches. And it’s a trap. Once they’ve got you they send you emails offering free bids and cheap bids – ‘get in in the next few hours and redeem them’. They’re carrots to get people to log on. I think it’s no different to casinos.”

Gambling by another name?

“The definition of gambling is betting something of value on an uncertain

outcome that has elements of chance,” explains Professor Nerilee Hing, head of the Centre for Gambling Education and Research at Southern Cross University. “You’re outlaying something valuable – money – hoping to win something valuable, such as an iPad. Because there’s an element of chance, it fulfils the definition.”

Dr Mark Griffiths, a professor of gambling studies at Nottingham Trent University in the UK, agrees. “To me, [penny auctions] are all but gambling in name and they don’t seem to be regulated by any organisation or authority,” he wrote in an article for the industry

newsletter *World Online Gambling Law Report*. He outlined several parallels between these websites and gambling, and believes regulators need to intervene.

“Theoretically, a person can bid again and again (on either a single or multiple products) with no certainty that they will ever win... it does not seem to depend on any discernible skill and is more like a chance-based lottery. If there is no real skill and it is essentially a chance activity, how is this not a form of gambling?”

“And any bidder who just misses out on winning an

item on a penny auction website also experiences a near-miss experience. [This] may lead to further bidding on other items as a way to relieve the frustration of not winning.”

“It’s chasing your losses,” says Hing. “People are continually chasing money they’ve already lost, which is very conducive to losing control over spending.”

Flying under the radar

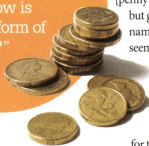
CHOICE approached several Australian experts in gambling and online gaming, none of whom had heard of penny auctions. While the pokies and online poker websites are well-known and well-covered by the media, these smaller operations, which seem to be gaining popularity worldwide, are barely a blip on the radar.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), the regulator charged with enforcing the Interactive Gambling Act, takes the view that the sites are just like eBay.

“ACMA has received a number of complaints about online auction sites, including penny auctions, and has investigated these,” says a spokesperson.

“[We] have taken the view that most online auction sites resemble traditional auction processes. The element of ‘chance’ or of ‘mixed chance and skill’ in an online auction process is no greater than that which applies to any more orthodox auction... despite the urgency of the penny auction process and its ‘game-like’ feel.”

“If there is no real skill and it is essentially a chance activity, how is this not a form of gambling?”



CHOICE verdict

The lure of a bargain can be hard to resist, but as the old adage goes, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. It’s possible to spend more on penny

auction bids than you would buying the same thing at a shop. And, as some members have discovered, there’s a good chance that even if you spend a lot of money, you’ll still end up losing. ■



Too good to be true

Far from dying out, work-from-home scams are becoming more dangerous than ever before. **Uta Mihm** outlines the most common traps.

Work-from-home offers that show up on telephone poles, in your inbox or as Google or Facebook ads can be tempting, especially if money and time are tight. An operation calling itself Mercury Industries, for instance, promises: "No cold calling, no selling to family and friends, no door-to-door sales! Just sales support for our growing company." And while it's true there is no cold calling, the offer is to take part in a money-laundering scheme that could see you do jail time.

Money laundering schemes are just one type of employment scam that has

recently become popular with fraudsters in Australia. Western Australia's consumer protection service, WA ScamNet, receives about 150 reports and enquiries regarding employment-related scams every month.

And scammers have plenty of incentive to keep on scamming. According to an Australian Institute of Criminology online survey, in 2009 work-from-home scams duped more Australians than any other type. More than 30% of people who fell for a scam, it found, fell for this type of scam.

14%
of work-from-home
scam victims lost
personal information
as well as money

Lose-lose scenario

According to the survey, 14% of work-from-home scam victims lost personal information, such as their bank account details, as well as money, making themselves vulnerable to identity theft.

Money laundering scams are the most dangerous. As Justice Minister Brendan O'Connor has warned, "Members of the public are being turned into money mules and are exposed to criminal charges themselves".

In 2007, Adam (not his real name) was prosecuted for transferring about \$3 million to China and Hong Kong in more than 300 transactions, each of them less than \$10,000 to avoid detection. He thought the funds were heading overseas to evade Australian tax. In fact, they were proceeds of a crime his "employer" had



committed. He was sentenced to five-and-a-half years prison.

How to protect yourself

The main warning sign of any scam is the claim that you can make a lot of money with little effort and no qualifications. You should:

- **Never disclose personal details** such as your credit card or account number to anyone, especially if they contact you by email or phone.
- **Ask for the offer in writing** and get advice before signing a contract. Check contact details such as phone numbers with an independent directory.
- **Beware of job offers requiring you to pay an upfront fee.**
- **Be especially wary of offers from overseas companies.**
- **Check with your local fair trading office for information** to help you decide whether the offer is legitimate.
- **Do a simple online search.** Other people may have commented on the offer in web forums. ■

NOT SURE IF IT'S LEGIT?

Scamwatch

(Australian Competition and Consumer Commission), 1300 795 995,

scamwatch.com.au

WA ScamNet names common scams (WA Department of Commerce),

scamnet.wa.gov.au

Australian Securities & Investment Commission (ASIC), 1300 300 630,

moneysmart.gov.au

UK banking industry's website has an up-to-date list of money laundering scams at banksafeonline.org.uk

TOP 5 SCAMS

1 Mystery shopper job

Mystery Shopping Inc has been luring Australians through newspaper ads promising \$300 per completed "assignment". Applicants are asked to email their details to an overseas email address and receive traveller's cheques. Their first assignment is to note security and customer service details while cashing them. Afterwards, they can deduct their fee before transferring the leftover money back to Mystery Shopping by untraceable wire transfer. These cheques are forged, and you commit a crime when you cash them. You can also be held responsible for repaying the money to the business who cashed the cheque.

2 Online payment processing job

An email job offer arrives from a company claiming to have found your resume on the Seek website. They offer you a position processing payments; only a little computer knowledge is required, and you'll be paid daily with a minimum income of \$4000 per month. Typically, you get another email saying there was a mistake and they had accidentally sent four times the amount of your paycheck. You're told to wire the rest of the money to someone else when you receive the cheque. The money you receive may have been stolen from other people's bank accounts.

3 RAC job offer You receive an email directly addressed to you, offering a job with the reputable WA company RAC Finance and promising \$3900 a month for only one or two hours work a day, four to five days a week. You're asked for your bank account details to receive payments that you're instructed to transfer to an account in Europe. With some of these scams, the initial money

transferred to you is recalled once you've transferred it overseas.

4 Envelope stuffing/email processing scam

In the old envelope-stuffing scam it was promised you would be sent up to 1000 stamped and addressed envelopes a week and that you would earn \$1-\$2 for every envelope stuffed. Once you pay the required fee, however, all you receive are flyer templates. You're told to put up the flyers on noticeboards asking people to send you \$2 in a pre-addressed, prepaid envelope, you'll then send them a flyer. In a modern take on this, Project 21 placed online ads

"Work from home processing emails. Earn up to \$5000 pm p/t". The catch is you're charged \$90 each for 12 manuals. The manual says to place ads like the one you responded to and sell copies of the manuals. The kit includes samples of the ads to adapt. If you follow this

advice you're advertising a job that doesn't exist and breaking the law.

5 Affiliate marketing (upfront-payment) scam Schemes such as GoogleCash claim to enable you to create a "click-through" portal that will supposedly generate a revenue stream for the buyer/job seeker. One unhappy customer reported to WA ScamNet that, after she paid for the starter kit, money was taken from her bank account another four times without her knowledge, and no kit arrived.

\$300

The promised amount for each "assignment" you complete under the mystery shopper scam



Overpacked

Online shopping may be producing unsustainable side-effects. **Rosalyn Page** rips the lid off excess packaging.

The rise and rise of online shopping means the amount of packaging material in the postal system is also rising. Recycling is improving and there is a trend towards lighter more compact packaging, but put simply there is just more stuff being shipped.

Packaging can be added at any point in the delivery chain – by the retailer, the warehouse or the transporter – and

unravelling who's responsible isn't always easy. But it's clear consumers will pay for the greater volume of packaging in the long run through higher product prices and increased fees for recycling.

Chain of custody

A pair of rubber thongs ordered online may be double-cushioned with bubble wrap and come in a box for a large toaster because the shipper is taking no chances.

Under Australian law, an item damaged prior to transport is the responsibility of the manufacturer or retailer.

If an item is damaged in transit, the transport company will likely have to pay.

Nutshell

- Products bought online have to be individually packaged to arrive to the customer intact.
- That extra packaging may be costing the environment – and consumers – in the long run.

Transport packaging can be added at different points – directly from a warehouse or retailer, or during shipping – further encouraging the use of bigger boxes and more bubble wrap because no one wants to be liable for damaged goods.

The Australian Retailers Association (ARA) says it doesn't have any numbers to show that extra packaging is used for online purchases, but notes additional packaging is required to ensure goods are delivered intact. The ARA also says there is evidence that retailers are putting sustainability initiatives in place.

The ARA encourages retailers to find ways of using renewable products, including reviewing their use of packaging and plastic bags and using recyclable materials. It believes packaging becomes a problem when it can't be recycled, and says major retailers and suppliers are collaborating to cut their use of packaging.

Sticky stats

- Australian consumer packaging measured 4,424,134 tonnes in 2010, and overall 62.5% was recycled.
- About 45 million international parcels arrived into Australia in the past financial year.
- Australia Post reports that international parcels arriving into Australia grew by 56% in the 2010-11 financial year.
- In Europe, 460 billion packaging items are labelled each year with the Green Dot recycling logo.

Boxes breakdown

The federal government took action on packaging as far back as 1999, when the Australian Packaging Covenant (APC) was launched. Its aim was to reduce environmental impact through the recycling of packaging, as well as to come up with better packaging designs and thereby cut down on the resources needed to produce them.

The latest version of the covenant, which came into effect in July last year, asks industry and government to commit to reducing consumer packaging through lifecycle management. In effect, it requires signatories, including brand owners, retailers and re-processors, to take an environmentally conscious approach to how packaging is created, used and disposed of.

The APC secretariat looks after this, administering and overseeing the sustainable packaging goals. It questions whether packaging for online orders is any greater than for retail purchases since packaging is needed to transport products whether from a warehouse to stores or individuals. In its view, online or in-store

10.8m

tonnes of packaging was produced in 2009 in the UK; 67% was recovered and 62% recycled

40%

of rubbish collected on 2010 Clean Up Australia Day was plastic, including polystyrene

32m

tonnes of packaging has been recovered through the European Green Dot scheme since 2009

purchases simply involve different combinations of packaging materials.

The chain of events is similar for both, the secretariat says. "Each sale involves primary packaging of the product, secondary (outer packaging, often a box) and tertiary packaging (transport packaging to and from the distribution centre or store), as well as a bag to get the product home. When an item is bought online, most of these needs still apply."

Diverging views

The Packaging Council of Australia, which represents packaging suppliers, brand owners and manufacturers, maintains product packaging hasn't increased. It argues

companies are using less packaging to cut costs and that used packaging for recycling has become an internationally traded commodity – greatly increasing the incentive to recycle.

But those who have to deal with the packing materials see things quite differently. The Waste Management Association of Australia agrees the universal goal of reducing the weight and cost of packaging is encouraging

innovation, but says the increased volume of packaged goods being sold will likely counter any reduction. This could mean added costs for consumers. The association believes that if waste volume increases so does the cost of dealing with it, and these costs will be passed on to customers.

Going green overseas

An innovative scheme called Green Dot operates in Europe for the recycling of consumer packaging. The Green Dot symbol shows consumers that the manufacturer of the product has contributed to the cost of the collection, sorting and recycling of the packaging. Manufacturers pay a licence fee based on the type of material used in the packaging. The aim is to encourage them to cut down on packaging.

CHOICE verdict

Consumers concerned with excess packaging should urge retailers and e-commerce companies to minimise packaging and lobby local councils and state governments to apply pressure as well. Meanwhile, CHOICE will look to the APC to include transport packaging requirements for retailers and shippers to work together to reduce the excess. ■



Your say

Lucinda Curran I buy fragile goods for work and they come bubble-wrapped and sticky-taped, and the box is overflowing with smelly static-filled polystyrene.

Craig Wilson I bought a soft first-aid bag the other day. The bag was in a clear plastic bag in a padded envelope inside an Express Post bag. Too many bags!

Karin Griffin We in the West need to wake up to ourselves and stop wasting valuable resources. There is necessary packaging and then there is total indulgent waste.

Peter Brown We hate the ever-increasing layers of packaging that the simplest things come in, such as soap wrapped in greased paper, cardboard and plastic.

Kylie-Dean Paget Quite a few online shops don't have enough packaging. When they just use heat/shrink wrap, the item always arrives damaged, and often if the item has clear plastic windows on it, the heat from the wrapping melts the plastic on the item and makes it useless to give as a gift.



Play nicely

Despite strict regulations, unsafe products are still making their way on to the Australian market, finds **Brendan Mays**.

NUTSHELL

- We look at some toy tips to keep your kids safe this silly season.
- Toys are tested, but rarely the ones you end up buying. Parents and caregivers are the last line of defence against dangerous playthings.

With the festive season around the corner, toy retailers are stocking shelves and importers are shipping in billions of dollars worth of products from overseas. Before toys make it into eager young hands, though, they progress through a maze of regulation and safety testing.

Safety standards have been developed over the decades to help avoid tragedy; yet potentially dangerous toys still slip through the cracks every year. And while some toys are pulled off the production line for testing, the one in your hand has probably never been

tested. This makes parents and other caregivers the last line of defence. We headed into the CHOICE toy testing laboratory to find out how to avoid the dodgy ones.

Total recall

About 73% – \$1.87 billion worth – of our imported toys, prams, games and sporting goods came from China in 2010, according to the ABS. While some big retailers in Australia such as Big W perform their own safety testing, most occurs in overseas labs. This is generally not cause for concern as companies still need to meet local safety and quality standards. However, the large volume of toys on the market means some unsafe toys will be sold. There were 39 toy recalls in Australia in 2010 and 10 as of October 2011 (most recalls occur from October onwards).

Recently, a tandem trike was recalled from Toys“R”Us due to a faulty handlebar weld that could fail and cause serious injury. Other recalled toys include the Mr Squirrel

73%
of our imported toys,
prams, games and
sporting goods came
from China in 2010

39

The number of toys
recalled in Australia
in 2010

Xylophone, a baby's toy sold at the Reject Shop that could be a choking

hazard, and stretchy Puffer Balls that look like glowing blobs on a string. Because of their elasticity, the ACCC determined that the gelatinous balls pose a strangulation risk.

Trouble in toy town

A 2010 report by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission found 12 toy-related deaths in children under the age of 15 and 186,000 injuries that led to the emergency room in 2009. Ride-on toys such as bikes and inline skates topped the list as the most dangerous, followed by toys with small parts. While there is no similar recent data available in Australia, in 2007 Kidsafe Victoria

reported at least 140,000 children visited an emergency department, though this included non-toy-related injuries. Productsafety.gov.au reported 9006 accidents in the same year involving trampolines, 10% of which resulted in admission to hospital.

With this in mind, we asked our expert toy testers (see right) to list those toys that have a history of causing trouble. In some cases, improvements have been made to newer versions, but always check that products meet safety requirements and follow any supervision or safety instructions carefully.

- **Ride-on toys** Whether it's toddlers or teenagers, some of the biggest toy-based calamities occur on wheels. Take appropriate safety precautions to minimise the chance of serious injury.
- **Baby walkers** are designed with adult supervision in mind, yet these toys are often the cause of trips and serious falls.
- **Swimming aids and flotation devices** require the same level of supervision and diligence as all swimming-related activities. The same goes for baby bath cradles and similar devices.
- **Beanbags** The polystyrene beads in beanbags can present a choking hazard for young children.
- **Toy boxes** are great for keeping play areas tidy, but without proper ventilation they can pose a safety risk should a child climb inside. Heavy lids that can trap fingers are also a no-no.
- **Projectile toys** can pose a danger to eyes if not used carefully. These toys often feature small parts not suitable for young children.
- **Lollipops** are not a toy but can pose severe risk for children who have them in their mouths while active. Make sure your kids don't run around with these or other lollies in their mouths. ■



BOYS AND THEIR TOYS

Stepping over a pogo stick, dodging the foam-dart firing range and facing a line-up of kids' dolls in various states of dismemberment are not what you'd expect to find in an accredited laboratory, but it's just another day at the office for CHOICE specialist toy testers Antonio Bonacruz (left) and Matthew Tung (right).

How many toys do you test in a year?

Antonio: We test between 300 and 500 different products a year, depending on how many different problem areas have been identified.

Matthew: We also test strollers and other products designed for children.

How many toys fail the safety tests?

Antonio: We typically test toys that have been identified as having problems, so most of them fail. However, CHOICE ran an off-the-shelf toy test a few years ago (CHOICE, October 2007) using 30 toys, and about half failed.

What are the risk areas?

Antonio: All toys on the Australian

market should be built to correct standards, but it's up to parents to check for obvious faults and dubious features.

Matthew: There is no strict guideline as to where problem toys may be found. In some cases, bargain basement-type stores may buy from wholesalers or discount sellers, which may mean toys do not have the same manufacturing quality as some of the well-known brands. However, it's a case-by-case scenario as big brands also have products recalled.

What advice do you have for parents?

Antonio: We recommend paying attention to small parts or anything that could potentially wrap around a child's neck and cause a strangulation hazard.

Matthew: Choking hazards are a big concern because of the risk of death or serious injury. While sharp edges are also a problem, the damage is typically limited to cuts and lacerations that are not normally life-threatening.

Spot the danger

Kids will put toys through their paces and then some, which is why it is important for parents to check them over first. There is such a wide range of toys we can't cover them all, but here are some key things to look out for.

✓ **Use the warning labels** Labels and warnings are often based on legal requirements and safety standards, which means they're there for a good reason. It's up to you to explain proper use to your child and provide supervision where necessary.

✓ **Remove the packaging** While a toy may be suitable for a certain age group, often the packaging itself can present

a danger with choking hazards and sharp edges and points.

✓ **Loud noises** Toys that make noises can damage hearing if held too close to the ear. Make sure you explain proper use to your children.

✓ **Large toys** Anything large enough to climb in should have appropriate ventilation. The same rules apply to masks and helmets.

✓ **Small parts and damaged goods** Small parts that break or can be bitten off are an obvious worry for younger children. However, it's also important to check older toys for damage, including sharp edges or parts that could trap fingers.

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?



On a recent overseas trip I made three separate ATM withdrawals for the same amount using my

St George debit card. For each withdrawal I was charged \$11.69 foreign currency conversion (3% of the transaction amount) plus \$5 overseas withdrawal fee – \$50.07 in total. Can these fees be justified?

CHOICE finance expert Brendan Mays replies: Depending on the ATM you use, you may have to pay an operator fee – the ATM company charges this fee, not your bank, and you generally can't avoid it (much like when you use another bank's ATM in Australia). On top of the operator fee, most banks will charge an additional overseas ATM fee (\$5 in this instance). Then there are the fees for currency conversion – 3% of the transaction amount here.

You can help avoid these costs by using a prepaid travel card or a product such as the 28 Degrees MasterCard from GE Money. 28 Degrees doesn't charge overseas ATM fees or currency conversion fees. Just make sure you load it with your own money to avoid interest.

Prepaid travel cards generally have fees. You can, however, lock in exchange rates in order to avoid

fluctuations. Prepaid travel cards are typically cheaper than using your normal card.



Brendan Mays

There are green star ratings for vehicles on-road usage info, but what about production, maintenance and recycling costs? I would have thought a Prius, for example, needs an expensive new battery pack every few years, whereas a simple diesel 4x4 would not and would likely achieve greater lifetime mileage. Wouldn't the Prius electronics also be more costly to recycle?



Matthew Steen

CHOICE auto expert Matthew Steen replies: Toyota conducts a lifecycle assessment of its Lexus CT200h (which is very similar to the Prius) and comparable non-hybrid models, which assesses a vehicle's total environmental impact from materials production, vehicle manufacturing, driving and maintenance to disposal stages. Its latest assessment shows that CO₂ emissions over the entire lifecycle of the CT200h are down by about 39% compared with similar vehicles, with significant reductions in nitrogen oxide and sulphur oxide emissions as well.

In the case of the Prius, Toyota's hybrid batteries are designed to last the life

of the vehicle. Indeed, several Prius vehicles in Australia have already achieved more than 500,000km, which equates to 25 years of average motoring. A replacement hybrid battery costs about \$2770.

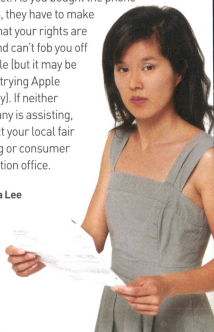
My daughter bought an iPhone from 3 Mobile about 20 months ago. She entered into a two-year contract, but the phone only had a one-year warranty. Her phone died a month ago and Apple refuses to fix it for free. What can I do?

CHOICE consumer law expert Katrina Lee replies: When you purchase goods, you're automatically protected by consumer guarantees that provide you with certain rights and apply irrespective of any warranty.

Generally, goods need to be of acceptable quality and work for a reasonable period. Your iPhone was purchased under the old consumer law but you still have rights. Your iPhone must be of merchantable quality and fit for its purpose. These rights are not limited to any set time.

You could argue with 3 Mobile that the phone should be expected to last for at least two years, given the length of the contract. As you bought the phone from 3, they have to make sure that your rights are met and can't fob you off to Apple (but it may be worth trying Apple anyway). If neither company is assisting, contact your local fair trading or consumer protection office.

Katrina Lee



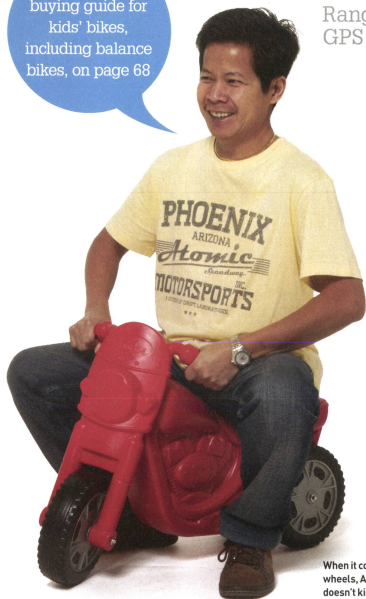
Ask us

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to us at Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Check out our buying guide for kids' bikes, including balance bikes, on page 68

Lab Tests

Ranges, sandwich presses and car GPS units – they're all on test here



When it comes to safe wheels, Antonio Bonacruz doesn't kid around



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Dual fuel models on test

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Catcher or mulcher?

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE has its own testing laboratories where our experienced technical staff puts products through their paces. We use test methods based on Australian standards, and we develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers, and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE SHOPPER

For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE subscriber number.

CHOICE ONLINE / CHOICE VIDEO

When you see one of these tags, there is more information about this test at www.choice.com.au.



CHOICE BEST BUY

Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.

CHOICE GREEN BUY

Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.





For serious cooks only

Dual fuel ranges may not be your best option, as Martha Psiroukis explains.

These 90cm ranges look impressive and could suit a serious cook who loves to entertain. If you're considering one, you're either replacing an existing model or renovating and looking for maximum capacity for

maximum output – even if it's just for those rare but special occasions such as Christmas.

While these freestanding ranges appear larger inside than built-in ovens, you can't place dishes on the oven floor (as you can with some built-ins) so the maximum height is from the lowest shelf position. The internal volume of the recommended model (page 48) is 82L, compared with 81L for the recommended 90cm built-in oven from our previous ovens test (see *CHOICE*, June 2011).

The oven performance of these is very good or better, but you can get better performance with a built-in oven. Grill scores could be better, with only two scoring very good or excellent. Their cooktop performance is also generally good, but again you can get better with stand-alone gas cooktops (see *CHOICE*, April 2011, page 62).

Our home economist, Fiona Mair, wasn't very impressed with dual fuel ranges overall. She found their instructions weren't informative enough, and the build and enamel quality (for ease of cleaning) wasn't to the standard of separate units. None has a pyrolytic self-cleaning option, and only four come with catalytic liners.

- Other things to consider include:
 - Their shelves and baking trays are significantly wider than those in a standard oven and can be difficult to handle, particularly when loaded with food. Also, the position of the oven door you need to bend to access the bottom kitchen sink and can be tricky.
 - You'll have to get down on your knees to clean inside the oven.

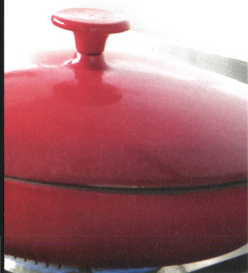
Nutshell

- These dual fuel ranges' overall performance is quite good, but you can get better performance with separates and possibly at a lower cost.
- They also don't offer the design flexibility of separates.

RELIABILITY

We don't have reliability information for dual fuel ranges, but we do for in-built ovens.

Refer to *CHOICE*, May 2010, page 17, or go to choice.com.au/ovens to see which brands rate best.



- Preheat times can be longer with the larger ovens. These models take from nine to 21 minutes to preheat on the fan-forced function to 190°C, and a little longer on the conventional function. However, the Blanco, Bosch and Omega all take longer than one hour to preheat to 240°C on the bottom element with fan function. You should preheat on the conventional or fan-assist function and then switch to bottom plus fan to base bake.
- All ranges require professional installation because they have to be wired in. You'll also need an additional 15 amp circuit to be installed if you don't already have one.
- A separate cooktop and oven give you maximum flexibility in your kitchen layout, allowing any style or size of both cooktop and built-in oven, which can be positioned at the right height. ▶

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

STOVE

- **Adjustable legs** to match the height of your benchtop.

GAS COOKTOP

- **Continuous trivet design** that allows pans to be moved around the burners without being lifted.
- **A good burner layout** – simmer and wok burners should be at the front so you don't have to lean over other burners to stir a sauce or stir-fry. Medium-sized burners are best positioned at the back.
- **Controls** that are a good size, ideally with a crossbar so they're easy to grip, and a clear pointer. They shouldn't be too close to the trivets or burners.
- **Labels** that are etched (not bonded) on stainless steel surfaces so they don't come off over time or after cleaning. Bonded labels sit on the surface, etched are in the surface – you can feel the difference with your fingertip.
- **Burners** Gas burners are rated in megajoules per hour (MJ/h), the amount of energy each uses on its maximum setting. Four-burner cooktops should have a good range of heat ratings, from low (about 3.5MJ/h–5MJ/h) to high (up to 10MJ/h or 11MJ/h), and wok burners should be about 12MJ/h–15MJ/h. Burner sizes vary from about 4cm–7cm in diameter. CHOICE has found that burner ratings don't correlate with cooking

performance results, so don't base your buying decision on the burner ratings – check our cooking scores for this at choice.com.au/stoves.

DOOR

- An **oven door** that's light and easy to open and stays open in any position without falling open or slamming shut.
- A large enough **window** for a clear view of all the shelves inside.

OVEN

- **Internal space** Take your largest baking dish with you to the store rather than going by the oven's stated capacity. For this test we measure from the deepest shelf or tray in the lowest shelf position to the grill element, side wall to side wall and the rear wall to the door. In many cases you can slide a wide dish in between the shelf supports. Using the oven floor is not recommended in any of these ovens. All but the Omega have a separate plate warming/storage drawer below it.
- **Catalytic liners** work by absorbing fat splatters. For the liners to work well, you need to regularly heat the oven to 250°C for an hour to burn off the splatters and, when cool, wipe them with a damp cloth.
- **Shelves** should have safety stops to prevent them from being pulled out accidentally, and should not tilt when pulled out and with a load.
- **Telescopic shelf runners** help keep the shelf stable and make it smoother to slide shelves in and out. Only the Blanco has one, for one shelf.
- The **grill tray** should slide in and out easily. Also look for a safety stop.
- A **smokeless grill tray** traps fat and grease below it rather than under a wire rack. No model on test has one.
- The **grill element** should be set high into the ceiling or have a shield so it can't be accidentally touched. It should also drop down for cleaning the oven ceiling.
- A **stainless steel exterior** that is fingerprint resistant will save cleaning.





BOSCH

WHAT TO BUY

81%

Bosch HSB745256A, \$3249

Good points

- Excellent oven performance overall – excellent for turn-down ability and base and multi-shelf cooking, and very good for roasting and low-temperature baking.
- Very good cooktop performance overall – excellent for simmering and very low heat for delicate foods, and very good for turn-down ability.

- Excellent coverage of catalytic liners.
- Grill element drops down for easier cleaning.
- The oven is relatively low-cost to run.

Bad points

- Very basic manual with no cooking instructions.
- Unable to view food when grilling on the top shelf.
- Grill tray can tilt down with a heavy load so that its contents slide.
- Controls can be operated by children.

HOW WE TEST

Multi-shelf cooking Our home economist Fiona Mair bakes scones over two shelves to test how evenly the ovens perform at a high temperature over a short time.

Oven turn-down ability She makes custard tarts to assess how the oven responds to a change from a high temperature, fan-forced or fan-assist function to a classic bake at moderate temperature.

Low temperature She bakes meringues to assess cooking ability at a low temperature for a long period.

Base cooking She cooks pizza at a very high temperature for a short period to assess the ability to crisp and brown the base and evenly cook the toppings.

Roasting Fiona roasts a whole chicken to assess baking a food at moderate to high temperature over a long period while retaining moisture and crisping the skin.

Grill Fiona toasts bread to assess the speed, evenness and heating area of each grill in a short time.

Fan grilling She fan grills sausages to assess speed and evenness, checking for flare-ups or smoking.

Cooktop turn-down ability Fiona cooks rice using the absorption method to assess the ability and speed of the medium burner to boil rice, maintain a desired level of heat at the lowest-temperature setting and the cooker's turn-down capacity/control response.

Simmering White sauce is cooked to assess the performance of the simmer burner at low temperatures for a prolonged time.

Very low heat Fiona melts chocolate directly over the simmer flame to determine if that burner is capable of gently cooking foods that are very sensitive to high temperatures.

High fast heat She cooks a beef and vegetable stir-fry on the wok or largest burner to assess its ability to deliver continuous high heat.

Ease of use Fiona assesses the stability of the cooktop's trivets, layout of burners, whether the pots fit comfortably and the stability of pan support. She also looks at how easy the controls are to use in relation to their size and shape, labelling and position. She assesses ease of cleaning all interior and exterior surfaces and whether there are appropriate spill catchment areas on the hob.



	COSTS		PERFORMANCE		
	Price (\$)	Oven running cost (\$/10 years)	Overall score (%)		Ease of use score (%)
	Bosch HSB745256A	3249	263	81	72
	Blanco FD9085FX	3699	264	78	70
	Smeg C9 GMAXA	3690	378	78	71
	Omega OF 901XA	1999	423	76	72
Westinghouse DSP965S Fisher & Paykel OR 90SDBGFX1	2639	495	76	74	
	2999	365	72	68	

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of Ease of use: 40%, Cook 25%, Oven 25%, Grill: 10%. **Features** See What to Look For, page 47. For details on which functions are worthwhile, see choice.com.au/stoves. **External dimensions** The height range given is for the height options available with the adjustable legs.

ABOUT THE REST

The other models on test are all good overall performers and worth considering depending on your needs. We outline here why they didn't quite make the recommended list.

- The **Blanco** is cheap to run and its oven performance is excellent. However, its grill evenness is just OK and its cooktop is let down by its poor turn-down ability.
- The **Smeg** has a very good oven and excellent grilling performance, but its cooktop is poor for turn-down ability.
- The **Omega** is very good for both oven and grill performance, but its cooktop turn-down ability is poor and low-temperature oven cooking isn't as good as the others.
- The **Westinghouse's** high heat cooktop cooking performance is only OK, grilling evenness is poor, and roasting and base

cooking aren't as good as for the others on test. We also found the oven rattles when in use and is expensive to run.

- The **Fisher & Paykel** is ordinary for grill evenness and oven turn-down ability. It's only OK for fan grilling, and its simmer burner is only OK at handling very delicate foods at very low temperatures. It has a poor viewing window, and many crevices where grime can build up.

Did you know?

TEMPERATURE TROUBLES

Contrary to what many people think, a large temperature fluctuation – say a variation of 30°C at a set temperature – does not correlate to poor cooking performance. In fact, Blanco and Bosch, with excellent oven performance scores, also have the highest temperature fluctuations (33°C & 36°C respectively) when set to 170°C. Good oven performance is much more than stable temperatures – it's a balancing act of many factors including insulation, control responsiveness and appropriately placed and accurate temperature sensors.

Look out for our 60cm upright range test in our next issue

FEATURES												SPECIFICATIONS			
Grill score (%)	Top and bottom elements (no fan, traditional)											Internal oven volume (L)	External dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Internal dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Claimed burner ratings (MJ/h)
	Rear element (fan forced)														
	Top and bottom elements (plus fan (fan assist))														
	Bottom element (no fan)														
	Bottom element (plus fan)														
	Top element (only grill element)														
	Grill element (no fan)														
	Half grill element (no fan)														
Grill element plus fan															
Fish/ BBQ burner															
Flame failure															
Self-cleaning (catalytic) liners															
73	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	82	(80-96) x 90 x 66	32 x 70 x 40	4.0/7.0/11.4/12.5
78	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	107	(90-91) x 90 x 65	36 x 70 x 45	3.8/6.9/11.0/15.0/11.0 (B)
90	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓		89	(90-93) x 90 x 64	34 x 75 x 44	3.9/7.5/12/15.8
80	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓			89	(88-94) x 90 x 64	34 x 75 x 44	4.0/7.0/12.3/15
55	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	80	(88-93) x 90 x 65	33 x 73 x 44	4.0/7.1/11.0/12.7
55	✓	✓	✓		✓ (A)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	95	(90-91) x 90 x 63	34 x 77 x 43	3.6/6.3/10.3/12.7

Contact

boschappliances.com.au
meaappliances.com.au

smeg.com.au
meaappliances.com.au
westinghouse.com.au
fisherpaykel.com.au

These are measured dimensions for the smallest box that will fit around the appliance. **Measured internal volume** is calculated from measurements of the deepest shelf/baking tray in the lowest position to the grill element, side wall to side wall, and the rear wall to the door. See Internal Space on page 47 for more. **Running costs** are based on using the oven on the fan-forced function at 150°C above room temperature (about 170°C) for one hour, three times per week for 10 years at 22 cents per kWh. **Price** Recommended retail, as of October 2011. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Only to be used as a warming function, not for cooking. **(B)** Fish/barbecue burner.



Pressing matters

A sandwich press is a handy gadget, says **Rebecca Gatto**.

A good sandwich press will give you delicious snacks for years. CHOICE tested 11 presses for ease of use and performance, and included two models still available from our previous test.

For performance, our home economist assessed the colour and evenness of browning and also how well the press accommodates regular-sized bread by toasting cheese-and-tomato sandwiches. Extra tests using focaccia and crusty panini allowed us to see how well the presses accommodate various bread types.

If you use a press regularly, and are cooking for more than one, spending a little more on a four-slice model is the way to go. It comfortably accommodates two serves of larger types of bread such as focaccia, whereas for most two-slice presses you might find some bread hangs over the edge. However, we were impressed with the Breville BSG520 Toast & Melt, as it has a good-size plate that can fit more than other two-slice presses.

Take care when using your sandwich press, as the surfaces get very hot and the hotplate can be exposed around the edges. Ensure you operate the press using the heat-resistant handle and keep little hands away at all times. ■

WHAT TO BUY

TWO-SLICE PRESSES



81%
Breville BSG520 Toast & Melt, \$60

Good points

- Very good overall.
- Adjustable height for making melts.
- Good-size plate accommodates more than the other two-slice presses on test.
- Indicator lights are well labelled.

Bad points

- Unevenly flattened cheese-and-tomato sandwich.
- Salmon filling was heated to less than 70°C.

Nutshell

- ▶ You won't need to spend too much more for a four-slice press that will accommodate all bread types comfortably.
- ▶ Safety is paramount when operating one of these presses, especially when children are around.



81%
Sunbeam GR8250B Compact Café Press, \$55

Good points

- Very good overall.
- Bread is evenly flattened.
- Adjustable height for making melts.
- Good-size plate can accommodate various bread types/sizes.
- Shortest heat-up time.

Bad points

- None to mention.



WHAT TO BUY

FOUR-SLICE PRESSES



81%
Breville BSG540 Toast
& Melt, \$90

Good points

- Very good overall.
- Bread is evenly flattened.
- Adjustable height for making melts.
- Good-size plate can accommodate various bread types/sizes.
- Indicator lights are well labelled.

Bad points

- None to mention.



81%
Sunbeam GR8450 Café
Press 4+, \$90

Good points

- Very good overall.
- Adjustable height for making melts.
- Good-size plate can accommodate various bread types/sizes.

Bad points

- Unevenly toasted and flattened harder bread.
- Salmon filling was heated to less than 70°C.

ABOUT THE REST

Two-slice

Neither the **Kambrook** or **Homemaker** presses have lockable top plates, so you can't use them for melts. Of the two, the Kambrook performs better, but the Homemaker is the cheapest on test and is still OK overall. The **Belle** from our previous test performed well but didn't toast as evenly as better-scoring models.

Four-slice

The **Russell Hobbs Reflections Panini Press** is the most expensive model on test, but lacks some features. The hot plate surface looks deceptively large – it's a four-slice model but we could only fit two regular sandwiches comfortably. The **Modern Living, Ronson and Russell Hobbs RHSP801** are OK overall, though the Russell Hobbs is borderline for performance – we saw some burnt areas and uneven browning. The **Tiffany SP4** from our previous test toasted bread unevenly, leaving large uncooked areas.

For more about what to look for, visit choice.com.au/sandwichpress



	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS		
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Storage latch	Lockable top plate height adjustment	Cord storage	Heat-up time (min:sec)	Contact
TWO-SLICE									
Breville BSG520 Toast & Melt 2-Slice Sandwich Press	60	81	80	83	✓	✓	✓	2:29	breville.com.au
Sunbeam GR8250B Compact Café Press – 2 slices	55	81	80	83	✓	✓	✓	1:38	sunbeam.com.au
Belle Stainless Steel Sandwich Press SP2 (A)	30	73	70	80	✓	✓	✓	2:40	saabappliances.com.au
Kambrook Profile Compact Sandwich Press KSG220	60	73	70	80	✓		✓	1:45	kambrook.com.au
Homemaker 2 Slice Stainless Steel Sandwich Press LW-010D	19	66	66	80	✓		✓	2:19	kmart.com.au
FOUR-SLICE									
Breville BSG540 Toast & Melt 4-Slice Sandwich Press	90	81	80	83	✓	✓	✓	3:16	breville.com.au
Sunbeam GR8450 Café Press 4+	90	81	80	83	✓	✓	✓	2:19	sunbeam.com.au
Abode 4 Slice Sandwich Press	35	73	70	80	✓	✓	✓	1:48	bigw.com.au
Russell Hobbs Reflections Panini Press 10814	140	73	70	80				(B)	russellhobbs.com.au
Ronson RSG400 4-slice Sandwich Press	79	67	60	83	✓		✓	1:55	housewares.com.au
Modern Living LW-031	48	67	60	83	✓		✓	1:53	target.com.au
Russell Hobbs Sandwich Press RHSP801	70	60	50	83	✓		✓	1:58	russellhobbs.com.au
Tiffany SP4 (A)	40	53	40	83	✓	✓	✓	2:30	gafcontrol.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of Performance: 70% and Ease of use: 30%. **Price** Recommended retail, as of August 2011. **TABLE NOTES (A)** These models are still available from our previous test in September 2008. **(B)** The power ready indicator light wasn't working, so we were unable to record heat-up time.



Nutshell

- Only one newly tested model makes our What to Buy list.
- More and more dishwashers come with salt dispensers, but they are a good idea only in hard water areas.

Salt with that?

In our latest round of testing, **Matthew Steen** finds dishwasher salt dispensers only make sense in some parts of the country.

As we test dishwashers, we come across a lot of new technologies. One that isn't particularly new, but is becoming more common, is the salt dispenser. This isn't your average cooking salt – it is designed to lower water hardness. Water is designated hard when there is a high mineral content (calcium and magnesium). When you have hard water, your dishwashing detergent is less effective. The salt is added to soften the water by adding sodium and potassium to the mix, letting the detergent do its job properly.

However, a salt dispenser is only worthwhile if you live in an area with hard water – so why have this feature if you don't need it? There are areas in Australia which do have harder water, but most of our major cities have soft water rather than hard – Adelaide is an

exception – making the salt dispenser redundant in most big population centres. Some dishwasher detergents have salt included in their formulation already.

Manufacturers aren't including the salt dispensers to make money, though some do spruik their own brand of salt. Since many dishwasher models come from Europe, which does have hard water in areas, it's easier for manufacturers to just keep them in, rather than redesign the

model for the Australian market.

You can check the water hardness in your area with your local water supplier. Hardness is measured

by calcium carbonate concentration, in milligrams per litre. Most water suppliers we checked with give different definitions of hardness in their water quality reports. The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines define good quality as between 60mg/L and 200mg/L. Hardness above 200mg/L will result in scaling and your detergent being less effective than usual. ▶

The new Asko model began leaking water immediately on start-up. The repairman we called said the seal was unusually flattened in one area, which meant a tight seal wasn't being maintained. Email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au if you experience leaking with this model.

WHAT TO BUY

The LG LD-1419W2 washes well but has a very long running time, so we can't recommend it. Neither LG nor Dishlex is as reliable as the brands below. For profiles of all dishwashers on test, go to choice.com.au/dishwashers.

STANDARD



Green Buy

77%

Bosch Classic Electronic SMS50E12AU/07, \$1249

This freestanding model has excellent water efficiency, is very energy-efficient, and good for washing. It's relatively quiet, very cheap to run and has a child lock on the door. But it's only OK for drying and has a long program time. The technically similar, stainless steel built-in Bosch Classic SMU50E15AU is available for the same price.



77%

Miele G5141i, \$1799

This built-in 14-place-setting model has excellent drying, very good water efficiency and is good at washing. It's relatively quiet and has a child lock on the door, but has a long run time and is expensive to run. Features include fold-down times, fan-assisted drying and an auto wash program.

COMPACT



75%

Bosch SKE53M05AU, \$1199

This built-in six-place-setting model is very energy-efficient and very good at drying. It scores well for washing but is only OK for water efficiency, and has a long run time. Features include a child-lock on the controls, time-to-go display, delay start and a cutlery basket that can be placed anywhere.

SLIMLINE



74%

AEG Electrolux Favorit F65411VI, \$1639

This nine-place-setting slimline model is excellent at drying and scores well for washing, but is only OK for energy and water efficiency. Features include a top basket that can be adjusted when fully loaded, time-to-go display and delay start.

ACCESSIBILITY

Using Independent Living Centre guidelines, our testers assess the newly tested models for people with disabilities. These are the best options from the this test:

For wheelchair users Any of the single drawer or compact types installed at a suitable height.

For people with upper limb dysfunction The Asko D5434 is recommended.

For people with vision impairment The Smeg DWA149W is suitable.

For people with cognitive disability The Fisher & Paykel DD60DCX6, Haier DW12-TFE4WH or the Miele G4101i are suitable. For more on what to look for, see choice.com.au/access.

Reliability

Refer to CHOICE, May 2010, page 16, for results of our latest reliability survey, or go to choice.com.au/appliance-reliability.



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COSTS

PERFORMANCE

FEATURES

	Price (\$*)	Running cost (\$ / 10 years)	Overall score (%)	Washing performance score (%)	Water efficiency score (%)	Drying performance score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Water used (L)	Energy used (kWh)	Noise (dB)	Cycle time (mins)	Auto program / dirt sensor	Easy-to-lift, height-adjustable top basket	Field
STANDARD	Bosch SMS50E12AU/07	1249	596	77	75	92	59	89	12	0.66	41	151		F
	Dishlex DX301WK	1009	1376	77	80	67	92	62	21	1.57	48	114	✓	F
	LG LD-1419W2	899	1290	77	76	71	95	66	23	1.45	42	173	✓	F
	# Miele G5141i	1799	1276	77	73	87	97	64	14	1.49	40	141	✓	F
	Bosch SMS63M08AU	1749	949	76	67	92	93	76	12	1.10	37	125	✓	F
	Bosch SMS65M08AU/25	1849	968	76	69	95	85	75	11	1.13	48	142	✓	F
	Dishlex DX103WK	739	1504	76	78	67	95	57	21	1.73	48	113		F
	Dishlex DX203WK	849	1249	76	74	76	91	66	17	1.44	50	100		F
	Miele G 5300 SC	1899	1311	76	71	87	97	63	15	1.53	37	141	✓	F
	Miele G 5775 SCVi XXL	2599	1185	76	68	90	99	68	14	1.38	45	146	✓	F
	Miele G 5500 SC	1999	1287	75	69	87	95	64	15	1.50	49	131	✓	F
	Smeg STH903	2690	1051	75	69	87	87	72	13	1.22	52	110	na	F
	Westinghouse WSF6602WR	949	1391	75	74	78	91	61	18	1.61	45	115	✓	F
	# AEG F88089MOP Favorit	2099	1344	74	69	87	93	62	14	1.58	35	154	✓	F
	Bosch SMU68M05AU/01	1899	965	74	64	94	88	75	12	1.12	38	133	✓	F
	# Fisher & Paykel DD60DCX6	1679	1055	74	66	81	97	73	15	1.20	47	110	na (C)	R
	# Miele G4101i	1399	1517	74	74	74	94	57	21	1.75	43	144	✓	F
	# Smeg DWA149W	999	1364	74	69	83	92	62	16	1.57	46	123	✓	F
	V-Zug Adora 60SL	2990	1231	74	73	66	91	67	21	1.39	50	105	✓	F
	Westinghouse WSU6603XR	1219	1410	74	72	80	88	60	17	1.64	43	146	✓	F
	Ariston LFF 825 X	1499	1367	73	68	86	90	61	15	1.60	48	129	✓	F
	Bosch SMS50E22AU/07	1399	572	73	69	92	54	90	12	0.63	45	152	✓	F
	LG LD-1421T2	1349	1352	73	71	68	94	64	24	1.52	43	175	✓	F
	Ariston LBF51	699	1445	72	70	83	84	58	16	1.69	49	138	✓	F
	Fisher & Paykel DD60DCW6	1479	1062	72	64	81	94	72	15	1.22	49	113	na (C)	F
	Fisher & Paykel DW60DOX1	1099	1279	72	69	86	78	64	15	1.49	36	147	✓	F
	Indesit DFG261S	799	1268	72	66	84	89	65	16	1.47	44	133	✓	F
	# Whirlpool ADP8000WH	649	720	72	67	90	57	84	11	0.82	47	132	✓	F
	# Asko D5434 (A)	1299	1416	71	74	82	60	60	17	1.65	44	165	✓	F
	DeLonghi DEDW60S	999	821	71	64	88	70	81	12	0.94	48	133	✓	F
	# Haier DW12-TFE4WH	499	846	69	63	90	56	80	11	0.98	54	116		F
	Samsung DMS500TRW	899	601	63	58	89	26	89	13	0.66	48	140	✓	F
COMPACT / SLIMLINE	Bosch SKE53M05 AU	1199	673	75	70	68	89	86	10	0.77	45	166	✓	F
	# Bosch SCE53M05AU/01 (B)	1399	680	75	65	87	91	86	8	0.77	49	125	✓	F
	AEG Electrolux F65411VI	1639	1357	74	76	57	94	62	19	1.56	51	114	✓	F
	Fisher & Paykel DD60SDFTX6	1159	574	73	63	78	90	89	8	0.66	44	115	na (C)	F
	Fisher & Paykel DD60SCW6	849	1062	72	64	79	94	72	8	0.61	49	113	na (C)	F
	Omega DW101WA	499	443	70	69	76	42	94	9	0.49	46	109	na (C)	F
	Technika TDX4SS	699	622	70	59	79	83	88	11	0.70	52	99	✓	F
	Fisher & Paykel DD90SDFTX1	1469	767	69	58	82	85	83	11	0.88	48	115	na (C)	F



SPECIFICATIONS

Half-load option	Eco wash	Fast wash	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Water connection	Place settings	Type*	Colour*	Contact
✓		✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	14	FW	W	bosch.com.au
	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 60	C rec	12	FW	W	dishlex.com.au
✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	lge.com.au
	✓	✓	81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	SS	miele.com.au
✓		✓	82 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	SS	bosch.com.au
✓		✓	85 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	SS	bosch.com.au
	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW	W	dishlex.com.au
	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	FW	W	dishlex.com.au
	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	miele.com.au
✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 57	H or C	15	FI	FI	miele.com.au
	✓	✓	81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	W	miele.com.au
✓	✓	✓	58 x 86 x 55	C only	12	FI	FI	smeg.com.au
	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 62	C only	13	FW	W	westinghouse.com.au
	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 60	C only	13	BI	SS	aeg-electrolux.com.au
✓		✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	15	SI	SS	bosch.com.au
	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	12	BI	SS	fp.com.au
	✓	✓	81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	SS	miele.com.au
	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	W	smeg.com.au
✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 57	H or C	12	SI	SS	vzug.com
	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C only	13	BI	SS	westinghouse.com.au
✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	aristonbrand.com
	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	14	FW	W	bosch.com.au
	✓	✓	85 x 61 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	lge.com.au
	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	aristonbrand.com
✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	BI	W	fp.com.au
	✓ (D)	✓ (D)	82 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	SS	fp.com.au
✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	arist.com.au
✓		✓	85 x 60 x 59	H or C	12	FW	W	whirlpool.com.au
	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	BI	W	asko.com.au
✓		✓	85 x 60 x 58	H or C	12	FW	SS	delonghi.com.au
✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C only	12	FW	W	haierlife.com.au
✓		✓	85 x 61 x 61	C rec	13	FW	W	samsung.com.au
		✓	46 x 60 x 50	H or C	6	BI	SS	bosch.com.au
		✓	60 x 60 x 48	C rec	8	BI	SS	bosch.com.au
	✓	✓	82 x 45 x 55	C rec	9	FI	FI	aeg-electrolux.com.au
	✓	✓	48 x 60 x 57	C rec	6	BI	SS	fp.com.au
✓	✓	✓	41 x 60 x 57	C rec	6	BI	W	fp.com.au
		✓	44 x 55 x 50	H or C	6	FW	W	omegappliances.com.au
✓		✓	85 x 45 x 58	H or C	8	FW	SS	technika.com.au
	✓	✓	48 x 90 x 58	C rec	9	SI	SS	fp.com.au

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of: Washing performance: 55%; Water efficiency: 15%; Drying performance: 15%; Energy efficiency: 15%.

Noise is measured 1m away and 1m up from the dishwasher, which is placed within cabinetry. The noise level varies depending on kitchen layout, but our reading gives a comparative measure. A difference of 3dB is noticeable to the human ear.

Features See What to Look For, page 56.

Water connection: H or C You can connect the dishwasher to hot or cold water. **C rec** The manufacturer recommends connecting to a cold tap, and the dishwasher heats the water itself. **C only** You can only connect the dishwasher to a cold tap.

Type: FW Freestanding, with a worktop (can generally be inbuilt as well). **BI** Built-in – may not have top or side panels; must be enclosed and anchored. **SI** Semi-integrated – a built-in type for which you can fit a panel to the door under the control fascia to match the rest of your kitchen cupboard doors. **FI** Fully integrated – built-in with the whole front matching your kitchen and the controls inside the door.

Running costs We estimate how much the dishwasher will cost over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash a full load every day using a normal or auto-sensing cycle, based on 22 cents per kWh for electricity and \$1.50 per 1000L water. We've recently adjusted electricity costs up from 20 cents, so you'll notice a difference compared with previously tested models. The largest running cost will be the cost of detergent which can vary significantly, so it's not factored in these calculations.

Price Recommended retail, as of October 2011.

TABLE NOTES

Indicates a newly tested model.

* Where possible, we've listed the white model code and price. Most models are available in other colours, finishes or types – usually at a higher price. The colour given for SI models is for the control panel.

SS Indicates any metallic or metallic-look finish; not all models are actually stainless steel.

na Not applicable – only has one drawer or basket, or in the case of the Fisher & Paykel Double DishDrawer DD60DC models, two separate drawers.

(A) Since its release in April 2011, Asko has replaced the auto program with daily which may have different performance characteristics than auto.

(B) Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.

(C) Has height-adjustable cup racks.

(D) Cannot be selected by user – wash cycle is chosen by auto-sensing program. ▶

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Dimensions Will your normal dinnerware fit into the dishwasher without crowding or hitting the spray arms? Take a few large dinner plates and tall glasses to the store, to check they both fit at the same time. Spin the spray arms to make sure they don't hit anything.

Auto program/dirt sensor programs are designed to optimise the amount of energy, water, time and temperature needed. But our research shows very few are effective.

Easy-to-lift height-adjustable top basket Almost all top baskets are height-adjustable, but if it is an easy-adjust system you can do this without removing the basket. Only a few can be adjusted when loaded. Larger internal tubs, often denoted by XL or XXL in the model number, mean that adjustable baskets may not be required – but they still can improve versatility.

Fold-down/removable plate racks can help when loading pots and awkward items. Fold-down types are easier as they don't need external storage when not in use.

An anti-flood hose has an electric cut-off near the water tap connection, which means it stops leaks in the hose, not just in the machine. An anti-flood hose is high-level protection for your machine and floors.

Half-load option is a program or option that may save water, time and energy when washing half a load. You can set some models to wash just one basket. This is handy for washing a smaller load daily, so the dishwasher doesn't get smelly. Models with auto program/dirt

sensor should automatically do this, but models in with a tick in this column (see table, page 54) have a specific program or option label as such.

Eco wash programs mostly save on energy by washing at lower temperatures, and are ideal for use with enzyme-based detergents. **Fast wash or glasses programs** are suitable for lightly soiled dishes, or if you rinse first (which we don't believe you should need to do).

Cutlery trays are no longer exclusive to Miele models. These are good for large utensils, and cutlery can be grouped on the tray as you load the machine, making unloading easier (but you can do this with baskets too). They may be safer, reducing the risk of stabs from knives and forks in standard cutlery baskets. Our results show they don't necessarily wash better than a cutlery basket. It's also worth noting that machines with cutlery trays tend to have shorter heights between racks, which may be a problem if you have tall glasses and larger plates – again, always check before buying. **Cutlery basket** An anti-nesting grid helps stop

the cutlery pieces from nesting, to enable a better wash. For added versatility, look for a cutlery basket that can be placed anywhere in the bottom basket.

A concealed heating element stops items being damaged if they fall through the basket – particularly plastics – and also means food cannot drop onto the element and cause a burning smell. All dishwashers on test have one.

Controls and labelling The controls should be easy to use and the labelling intuitive and clear. Look for engraved or etched labels on stainless steel so these don't come off when cleaning. Only use a microfibre cloth, or warm soapy water on bonded labelling.





Nutshell

- You don't have to pay a lot for a decent set-top box.
- If you're vision-impaired or have hearing problems, there's now a set-top box for you.

Set-top boxes are a small part of the big change to digital TV. They play an important role because they're a cheap and easy way to get more channels, increased picture quality and often better reception. In this test update we've added nine new models to the five still available from our last test (see *CHOICE*, March 2011), as well as a couple that are supplied under the Digital Switchover Household Assistance Scheme (HAS). We look at

A set-top box can make the transition to digital TV a simple and inexpensive exercise, says **Chris Ruggles**.

these, as well as the Bush BHAS03 talking set-top box for people who have vision problems.

The digital safety net

Australia is switching to digital TV, and by 2013 all analog signals will be switched off. Currently, free-to-air TV is broadcast in both analog and digital, but the analog signals will be gradually phased out, region by region, across Australia. For most people, making the switch to digital TV is a relatively straightforward and inexpensive exercise. However, the federal government recognises some people may need help to get ready for digital TV.

The HAS is available for people who receive a full-rate pension, including the Disability Support Pension, Age Pension,

Carer Payment, DVA Service Pension or DVA Income Support Supplement. A letter will be sent from Centrelink to these pensioners about six months before each region is due to switch over. Eligible people will receive, free of charge, a high-definition set-top box as well as installation, a demonstration of the equipment, 12 months warranty, service and technical support. For more information, visit digitalready.gov.au.

The Bush BHAS01UR and Hills HD94003C are currently being supplied under the HAS scheme in Queensland. Both boxes are easy to use and have OK tuners, which means they'll handle most situations well. We were impressed with the Hills' remote control, but using the controls on the front of the unit can ▶

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Connections You can expect a variety of connections on set-top boxes, ranging from some that are common to all, such as HDMI and component, to less common ones, such as a USB for playing music or picture files.

Digital audio outputs allow you to connect the set-top box to a sound system for the best sound. RCA-type

connections are common and use a familiar cable. Optical TOSLINK cables work just as well, but are more expensive and can be fragile.

Antenna pass-through allows you to connect another device to the antenna without going

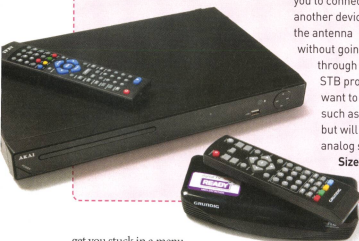
through the STB processor. This is handy if you want to attach an analog device such as a VCR at the same time, but will be less useful once the analog signal is turned off.

Sizes also vary considerably, so check the dimensions in

the table (below).

The remote control may take the place of your TV's remote, so it's handy if it can perform some basic functions such as turning the TV off or changing the volume.

Onscreen menus should be easy to read and logical in format. An onscreen guide to the remote control buttons allows you to easily check the functions that you use infrequently.



get you stuck in a menu and you have to turn the box off to get out.

Many vision-impaired people value television as a form of communication, but the difficulties they encounter with controlling a TV or set-top box can be very frustrating. Bush Australia has been working with the Digital Switchover Taskforce and Vision Australia to bring to market a talking set-top box (BHAS03, \$199). We understand Hills Holdings also has one due on the market sometime soon. You can choose to use the talking feature, which will speak the menus and commands in an Australian accent, or leave the feature off and use it as a normal set-top box. Unfortunately we couldn't get one in time for our technical reception tests, but it

For those with hearing problems, all set-top boxes should be capable of showing closed captions as well as subtitles.

performed quite well in our ease of use

assessment without the talking feature enabled. We contacted a number of Vision Australia clients who've been using versions of this set top box for some months, and their reactions to it are very positive in general.

There are some minor quibbles, though. The voice can mispronounce some words and lacks smoothness at times, which can make it hard to follow complicated things such as the electronic program guide. The Help button could also be easier to locate. However, the spoken key learning feature gets high praise, and could be useful for all set-top boxes. In future, there's a chance that we'll have broadcast audio description of what's happening onscreen, and set-top boxes like the BHAS03 will handle this as well. ■

	COSTS		PERFORMANCE
	Price (\$)	Annual energy cost (\$)	Overall score (%)
# Digitel HD3300	79	3.60	74
# Bush DFTA50FVE	119	3.80	71
# Akai AD175X	130	4.10	69
# Akai AD163X	150	4.20	68
Wintal STB10HD	80	4.10	68
# Bush DFTA46R	85	3.10	67
Grundig GSTB4101HD	129	4.00	67
Phoenix JT8000HD	100	5.40	67
# Strong SRT 5431	69	2.60	67
TEAC HDB849	69	3.70	65
# Grundig GSTB3106HD	80	2.70	65
# Toppo TP1500	129	3.80	65
# Topfield TBF7200	109	5.00	64
Bush DFTA16HD	70	3.00	60

USING THE TABLE SCORES The overall score is made up of: Ease of use: 50% Digital tuner performance: 40%; Standby energy consumption: 10%.

WHAT TO BUY



74%

Digitel+ HD3300,
\$79

Good points

- Good digital tuner performance.
- Records to USB.
- Plays video and sound files, and displays still pictures from USB.
- Best ease of use score.
- Well-organised onscreen interface.
- Good front panel controls.

Bad points

- No firmware upgrade capability.



71%

Bush DFTA50FVE,
\$119

Good points

- Over the air firmware upgrade.
- Good user manual.

Bad points

- USB port for firmware upgrade only.
- No front panel controls or display.

ABOUT THE REST

All score OK or better for ease of use. Both Akais include a DVD player, and these and the Phoenix have good tuner performance scores. Tuner scores above 55% indicate the box can handle most normal situations and, as the scores increase, the tuner can cope with more interference and weaker signals.

Those that are able to record to USB (see table, opposite) can also play back a number of music, video and still image files. The Bush DFTA16HD can't record but can play back from USB. The Grundig's playback is limited to JPG, BMP, WMA and AVI files.

The Phoenix is the most expensive to run, with the Topfield not far behind, but at about \$5 a year neither will be much of a drain on your budget.

All models except the Digital+ can be upgraded through a firmware update, and the Grundig and Bush DFTA46R and DFTA50FVE can be upgraded via an over-the-air broadcast. Instructions for the Phoenix warn that upgrades should only be done by the product's support team.

The Strong had no cables supplied in the box and its front panel controls are limited to changing channels. The latter is also true of the Topfield, although it came with both composite and component cables.

All models have digital audio output, but the Toppro and Topfield are limited to optical TOSLINK connections, whereas the Phoenix and Wintal have both TOSLINK and RCA.

FEATURES										SPECIFICATIONS	
Standby energy score (%)	Standby energy consumption (W)	USB (rear, front)	Component RCA video output	S-video output	Digital audio output – coaxial RCA	Digital audio output – TOSLINK	Other media playback from USB device	Records to USB device	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	Weight (kg) **	Contact
80	0.56	1/0	✓		✓		✓	✓	4.5 x 26 x 19	1.0	digitelplus.com.au
100	0.32	1/0	✓		✓				4.5 x 25 x 16	0.7	bushaustralia.com.au
60	0.75	0/1	✓				✓	✓	5 x 36 x 24	1.5	audion-mm.com
60	0.79	0/1	✓		✓		✓	✓	4.5 x 30 x 23.5	1.3	audion-mm.com
100	0.32	0/1	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	6.5 x 29.5 x 23.5	1.4	wintal.com.au
80	0.59	0/1	✓		✓		✓	✓	5 x 18 x 13	0.6	bushaustralia.com.au
100	0.34	1/0	✓		✓			✓	4.5 x 24.5 x 16	0.7	grundig.net.au
80	0.57	0/0	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5 x 26 x 21	1.0	phoenixtelevision.com.au
80	0.52	0/1	✓		✓		✓	✓	4.5 x 22 x 16.5	0.7	strong.com.au
80	0.52	0/1	✓		✓			✓	4.5 x 32 x 26	1.4	teac.com.au
80	0.69	1/0			✓				3.5 x 17 x 9	0.3	grundig.net.au
60	0.78	0/1	✓			✓	✓	✓	5 x 26.5 x 21.5	1.0	topfield.com.au
100	0.42	0/0	✓			✓		✓	5.5 x 26 x 20	1.1	topfield.com.au
60	0.73	0/1		✓			✓	✓	3.5 x 16.5 x 8.5	0.2	bushaustralia.com.au

Energy cost is calculated on five hours' use and 19 hours in standby each day for 365 days at 22 cents per kWh. Price Recommended retail, October 2011. TABLE NOTES * Newly tested model. * Rounded up to the nearest 0.5 cm. ** Rounded to the nearest 100g.

TOWNSVILLE

TOWNSVILLE

Smooth ride

Denis Gallagher looks at the best GPS units to get you from A to B without using the F word.

With sales of car GPS devices on the slide, companies are offering more for less in an attempt to attract new users. CHOICE tests performance and accuracy to separate the best from the rest.

Keeping it live

Live traffic updates using the SUNA Traffic Channel (see What to Look For, page 62) seemed promising when first introduced in 2007. However, the annual subscription fee wasn't popular and limited availability outside Sydney and Melbourne for the first couple of years hampered its use. Today, car GPS makers deliver reasonably priced SUNA solutions (usually with the subscription included in the purchase price) and coverage in all capitals bar Hobart and Darwin.

TomTom recently introduced its own version of live traffic called HD Traffic. Every TomTom HD Traffic user sends and collects live traffic data through a

phone SIM embedded in the unit. This information is analysed to provide live updates to HD Traffic users, with traffic flow information as well as alternative routes based on congestion in the immediate area. You don't have to pay for the SIM or network access – and the first year's subscription is free – but you do pay \$70 for each following year. The service also allows you to access mobile speed camera information, Google and weather updates.

Anyone can check out the website tomtom.com/livetraffic to see how the service would appear on the GPS device, and even if you don't get a TomTom, you can use the site to see traffic conditions before leaving home.

Nutshell

- An alternative to the SUNA live traffic channel is now available.
- Shop around during the lead-up to Christmas for deals.

The next big thing

Some new features in car GPS devices provide real benefits, such as lane guidance and school zone alerts, while others such as 3D landmarks are of questionable value.

Natural guidance or landmark guidance is the latest development available on some devices, with some Navman units using maps with specific object references such as "turn left at the church" or "take a right turn at the yellow building on your left".

This feature is supposed to help Gen Y drivers who feel "twice as stressed as baby boomers while driving", according to Navteq research. It remains to be seen how useful this feature is, or if drivers become more stressed when the yellow building is re-painted blue! ▶

Christmas bonus

If you're looking for map updates and live traffic (if your device supports this service), the period leading up to Christmas is the time to keep an eye out for the best deals as companies compete for your dollar and the chance to claim to be the most popular car GPS device of the year.

WHAT TO BUY



89%

TomTom Go Live 2050,
\$399

Good points

- Excellent city performance.
- HD traffic service (free for one year).
- Very good rural performance and verbal instructions.
- Excellent screen quality and points of interest (POI) categorisation.

Bad points

- Screen can be glary/show fingerprints.
- No trip log functionality.



88%

TomTom Go Live 820,
\$299

Good points

- Excellent city performance.
- HD traffic service (free for one year).
- Very good rural performance, verbal instructions and screen quality.
- Excellent categorisation of POI.

Bad points

- No trip log functionality.



88%

TomTom Via 220,
\$199

Good points

- Excellent city performance.
- Very good rural performance, verbal instructions and screen quality.
- Excellent categorisation of POI.

Bad points

- No trip log functionality.



87%

Garmin nüvi 2250,
\$179

Good points

- Excellent city performance.
- Very good rural performance, verbal instructions and screen quality.
- Lightest model on test.

Bad points

- No QWERTY keyboard option.
- Screen brightness cannot be stored separately for day and night modes.



87%

Garmin nüvi 2460LT,
\$349

Good points

- Excellent city performance.
- Very good rural performance and verbal instructions.
- Excellent screen quality.

Bad points

- Screen brightness cannot be stored separately for day and night modes.



85%

Garmin nüvi 3760,
\$449

Good points

- Very good city and rural performance.
- Very good verbal instructions.
- Excellent screen quality.

Bad points

- Glossy screen surface can be glary and show fingerprints.
- Screen brightness cannot be stored separately for day and night modes.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Routing options to select the shortest or fastest route, and/or exclude toll roads, unsealed roads or highways from the calculated route.

Full-route display Most devices show a line on the map from your existing position through to your destination.

Walking mode allows you to plot a route for pedestrians, such as taking a short-cut through a park.

Text to speech (TTS) The GPS device announces the street name so you know when to turn without having to glance at the screen. All models provide more than one voice option, which can be handy if you don't like the default voice. One thing to note is that only the completely computer-generated voices provide TTS. This means that while Homer Simpson will tell you to turn left in 200

metres, he can't tell you to turn left into North Terrace in 200 metres.

Remote trip planning (also known as A-B routing) allows you to run through your driving route in virtual mode before leaving if the starting point is not your current position.

Trip log records your travels and saves the information to post online in an application such as Google Earth.

Announces school zones

Some tell you when you're approaching a school, while others show a speed alert only.

Speed alert warns you when you exceed the speed limit for the road you're on. However, speed limit data in the GPS can sometimes be inaccurate, so don't rely solely on the GPS for this information – check the speed limit signs.

Bluetooth Some units can communicate with Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones, which allows you to make hands-free phone calls and call some POIs directly.

SUNA allows you to access live traffic information out of the box with a SUNA subscription integrated into the unit. Three models include this and a further six offer it as an option. TomTom has abandoned the SUNA solution for live traffic updates and introduced HD Traffic (see page 60), with the TomTom Go Live 2050 and 820 models on test offering this feature free for one year followed by a yearly subscription.



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PERFORMANCE

FEATURES

	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	City performance score (%)	Rural performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Verbal instructions score (%)	Screen quality score (%)	Points of interest score (%)	Map refresh score (%)	Routing options: No tolls / No unsealed roads / No highways	Full-route display	Lane guidance	Walking mode	More than one TTS	Remote trip planning	Itinerary planning	Trip log	Traffic lights	Safety cameras	Fixed speed camera warning
# TomTom Go Live 2050	399	89	95	85	80	82	97	96	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# TomTom Go Live 820	299	88	100	85	80	78	87	96	80	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# TomTom Via 220	199	88	100	85	78	78	87	96	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# Garmin nüvi 2250	179	87	100	85	82	83	87	78	80	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# Garmin nüvi 2460LT	349	87	95	85	87	82	90	78	80	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# Garmin nüvi 3760	449	85	85	85	86	82	90	78	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
TomTom Via 160	249	82	90	80	81	67	87	100	50	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Uniden iGO43	159	81	90	80	67	83	67	100	80	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
TomTom Start 10	179	76	90	75	72	67	63	100	30	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# Navman Ezy45	179	76	90	55	75	80	72	86	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# Navman My85XLT	349	76	90	55	75	80	72	86	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# Uniden iGO500	199	75	95	80	77	67	68	45	60	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# Navman Ezy15	149	74	85	55	67	80	72	86	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# Navig8r T50B	229	72	95	65	74	67	60	45	80	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Navigon 40 Easy	219	67	95	20	72	72	77	69	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Navigon 40 Plus	249	67	95	20	72	72	77	69	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Navigon 40 Premium	329	67	95	20	72	72	77	69	90	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Lane guidance on a GPS device recognises where you are on a multi-lane road and informs you when to start moving across to the exit lane well



before making the turn. Onscreen arrows show you the best lane to be in when approaching a turn and the unit suggests when it might be time to move towards the far left or far right lane approaching an exit.

Touchscreen type Apple's popular capacitive touchscreen, now common on most smartphones, allows you to use your finger pad to make selections on the screen. Resistive screens also allow you to use a stylus or fingernail to make a selection and are still the most common option for car GPS devices. While a capacitive screen may seem ideal for smartphones, those who operate their GPS using their fingernails may find the resistive screen to be more effective.

Claimed battery life All these figures are claims and haven't been tested by us.

However, they may provide a useful indication if you want to use your unit for a small trip while charging another device.

Ready to navigate is the time from the moment our tester turns on the unit until enough satellites have been located to provide a position. This time may differ depending on your location and satellite position. The newly tested models (marked with a # in the table) were tested from their current position. The previously tested models in the table were tested after recalculating from the last known position, which was a significant distance from the current test position and took more time to be ready to navigate.

NZ map support All models on test allow you to download maps for travelling in NZ, but the Uniden, Garmin and Navig8r models already have them loaded.

SPECIFICATIONS

Wide screen	Bluetooth	Live traffic info included	Map support OSX	Touchscreen type	Map provider	Map update pricing (\$)	Memory card type	Ready to navigate (sec)	Screen dimensions (mm, WxH)	Battery life (claimed, hrs:min)	Weight (g)	Contact
✓	✓	✓(B)	✓	Capacitive	Whereis	50 (C)	na	11	114 x 65	2	264	tomtom.com
✓	✓	✓(B)	✓	Resistive	Whereis	50 (C)	MicroSD	10	97 x 56	2	199	tomtom.com
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Whereis	50 (C)	MicroSD	12	97 x 56	2	176	tomtom.com
✓	✓	Opt	✓	Resistive	Whereis	Free (D)	MicroSD	26	71 x 53	3	107	garmin.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Whereis	Free (D)	MicroSD	21	111 x 63	3	192	garmin.com.au
✓	✓	Opt	✓	Capacitive	Whereis	Free (D)	MicroSD	30	111 x 61	4	114	garmin.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Whereis	50 (C)	na	90	95 x 55	2	181	tomtom.com
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Whereis	45 (E)	MicroSD	90	95 x 55	2:30	140	uniden.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Whereis	50 (C)	na	68	70 x 53	2	122	tomtom.com
✓	✓	Opt	✓	Resistive	Navteq	99	MicroSD	10	97 x 56	4	146	navman.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Navteq	Free (F)	MicroSD	7	113 x 64	4	191	navman.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Whereis	45 (E)	MicroSD	10	112 x 62	2:30	159	uniden.com.au
✓	✓	Opt	✓	Resistive	Navteq	99	MicroSD	10	71 x 53	4	123	navman.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Navteq	99 (C)	MicroSD	20	111 x 63	2	175	navig8r.com.au
✓	✓	Opt	✓	Resistive	Navteq	110 (F)	MicroSD	90	97 x 55	2:30	151	navigon.com
✓	✓	Opt	✓	Resistive	Navteq	110 (F)	MicroSD	88	97 x 55	2:30	149	navigon.com
✓	✓	✓	✓	Resistive	Navteq	110 (F)	MicroSD	95	97 x 55	2	156	navigon.com

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

In-car performance: 45%
(city 22.5% / rural 22.5%)
Ease of use: 15%
Verbal instructions: 15%
Screen quality: 10%
Points of interest: 10%
Map refresh: 5%

Durability check Our tester also carries out a durability check where each GPS is placed in an oven at 60°C for four hours, to simulate being left in a car on a hot day. All the models on this test passed this test.

Features See What to Look For, above.

Price Recommended retail, as of September 2011.

TABLE NOTES

Opt Optional.

Newly tested model.

(A) From September 2011 production.

(B) First year HD live subscription included, then \$70 per year.

(C) Four map updates for 12 months.

(D) Promotion until February 2012 with map updates for the life of the device.

(E) Whereis maps from www.navixtras.com.

(F) Updates for 24 months.

na not applicable.

The light fantastic

CFLs are now common in most homes, but LEDs are also beginning to move in, says **Chris Barnes**.

It doesn't seem so long ago that compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) took over from the traditional incandescent lightbulb. But already there's an alternative technology looking to take the CFL's place.

CFLs are energy-efficient and long lasting, but aren't without their problems. They can be slow to warm up to full brightness, they're generally bigger than their incandescent equivalents and so don't suit all light fittings, and last but far from least, they contain mercury (see *Mercurial Matters*, opposite).

Enter the light-emitting diode, or LED. They've been commonly available for years in bicycle lights, torches and garden lights and are also available as downlights. Most LED lamps available are relatively low-light output – comparable to a 25W or 40W incandescent – but brighter 60W equivalent models

are starting to appear. We've included one in this test: the Philips Master LED bulb.

Watt's that?

CFL packaging often indicates both actual wattage (power usage) and equivalent incandescent wattage (as an indication of brightness). Since equivalent incandescent wattage is an imprecise measure of light output, and some people aren't as familiar with incandescent lights – given CFLs have been commonly used for more than 10 years – many lamps now state their claimed light output in lumens (lm). Ten models on test have a claimed lumen output on the packaging. So how do lumens and incandescent wattages relate? As a rough guide, it's fair to say a 40W incandescent puts out a minimum of 340lm, a 60W 610lm and a 75W 840lm. It is worth noting these are minimums and the lumen value is often higher. ■

USING THE TABLE Scores We haven't yet reached the lowest claimed lifespan of 8000 hours, but our results so far give a good indication of how the lamps are performing. The overall score is comprised of: Initial luminosity score: 40%; 2000-hour luminosity score: 40%; Failure score: 20%. **Initial luminosity score** is based on the light output of the lamp after 100 hours burn-in. The closer to its claimed lumens (or the luminosity of its claimed equivalent incandescent) the better. The best-scoring models exceeded their claim. **2000-hour luminosity score** is similarly based on the light output after 2000 hours operation. **Failure score** is based on how many of the 10 samples have failed so far (>20% per failure). **Warm-up time** is the time taken to reach 90% of maximum brightness. **Claimed wattage** is the labelled actual wattage for each lamp. Our measurements indicate this is a reliable figure. **Claimed life expectancy** is the number of hours the lamp should last in normal operation (about five hours on per day). It is an average lifespan, not the minimum you can expect from every sample. The lamp's lifetime can be reduced by unusual operation, such as very frequent switching on and off or being situated in extremely cold or hot locations. **Price per lamp** is average retail price or what we paid in April 2011. Some come in packs of two. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Also sold as MyAmbiance LED.

	PERFORMANCE						
	Price per lamp (\$)	Overall score (%)	Initial luminosity score (%)	2000-hour luminosity score (%)	Failure score (%)	Failures after 2000 hours	Warm-up time
Woolworths Essentials FE-11SB-14W	3.95	84	80	80	100	0	00
Osram Micro Twist 14W/865 E27	6.40	80	80	70	100	0	00
Sylvania Mini-Lynx Twister 615223	12.35	80	80	70	100	0	00
Philips Master LED bulb MV dimmable 12W (A)	60.00	76	70	70	100	0	00
Coles Mini Compact Spiral Lamp V04492/ EEMSES-15	3.99	72	70	60	100	0	00
GE FLE15GLS/T3/827/E27	6.00	72	70	60	100	0	02
Black and Gold BG15W-1ES	4.79	72	70	60	100	0	00
Sparsam Low Energy Bulb 30149453	14.99	72	70	60	100	0	00
Megaman GK715D	26.00	68	70	60	80	1	08
Nelson Dimmable MELSD15BC	9.50	68	80	70	40	3	00
Osram Duluxstar Twist 13W/827	3.20	68	70	60	80	1	00
Lightstar GLS 25606	9.90	64	70	50	80	1	12
Megaman Compact Classic GSU115i-ES-27K	19.44	64	60	50	100	0	02
Nelson Little Greenie Energy Saver MELTG15ES	5.92	64	60	50	100	0	00
Lightstar GLS 25605	9.90	60	70	50	60	2	13

WHAT TO BUY


84%

Woolworths Essentials
FE-11SB-14W, \$3.95

Good points

- Very good initial luminosity.
- Very good luminosity after 2000 hours.

Bad points

- None to mention.


80%

Sylvania Mini-Lynx
Twister 615223, \$12.35

Good points

- Very good initial luminosity.
- Good luminosity after 2000 hours.

Bad points

- None to mention.

For more details about CFLs, including how we test, go to choice.com.au/cfl


80%

Osram Micro Twist
14W/865 E27, \$6.40

Good points

- Very good initial luminosity.
- Good luminosity after 2000 hours.

Bad points

- None to mention.

ABOUT THE REST

The Philips LED bulb is a good performer and being the only LED lamp on test, it should have much better long-term performance than the rest – it would want to in order to justify its comparatively high price.

The Coles, GE, Black and Gold and Sparsam are all good overall performers and are worth considering, though their luminosity has decreased significantly after 2000 hours.

Mercurial matters

The mercury content of CFLs is very small – 5mg or less – but old or broken CFLs should be carefully cleaned up and disposed of; see choice.com.au/cfl for details. But the mercury issue should be kept in perspective. Most electricity in Australia comes from coal-fired power stations, which emit significant amounts of mercury. CFLs are much more energy-efficient than the equivalent incandescent, so over the life of a CFL, the overall mercury amount put into the environment is still reduced.

SPECIFICATIONS

Claimed life expectancy (hours)	Length (mm)	Width (mm)	Shape	Contact
10,000	113	45	Spiral	woolworths.com.au
10,000	100	56	Spiral	osram.com.au
10,000	105	49	Spiral	sla.net.au
25,000	108	63	Spiral	philips.com.au
10,000	124	55	Spiral	coles.com.au
8000	119	61	Globe	geciasia.com
10,000	134	41	Folded tube	iga.com.au
10,000	125	50	Spiral	ikea.com.au
10,000	125	68	Globe	au.megaman.cc
10,000	123	51	Spiral	nelsonlamps.com.au
8000	119	50	Spiral	osram.com.au
8000	130	67	Globe	crompton.com.au
15,000	116	64	Globe	au.megaman.cc
8000	133	40	Folded tube	nelsonlamps.com.au
8000	131	65	Globe	crompton.com.au

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Colour temperature basically means different types of light. The colour temperature is measured in kelvins (K) and is indicated on the lamp and its packaging. Warm white (3000K) is a yellowish light, similar to that from an incandescent lamp. All lamps on test are warm white. Cool white (4000K) is a white light, similar to that from fluorescent tubes, and suitable for offices, kitchens and bathrooms. Daylight (5000K or more) is a blue-white light equivalent to outdoor daylight.

Shape The shape of a CFL doesn't necessarily affect its brightness,

though we have found in our testing that spiral lamps tend to put out more light than folded tube lamps.

Dimmable Several types of CFLs are suitable for use with dimmer switches, but check the packaging to make sure you have the right type.

Instant light Modern CFLs activate almost instantly with a reasonable light output, so in most cases they're suitable for use in stairways, cellars and other areas where you need immediate, bright light.



Nutshell

► It's important to make your home safe for your toddler, but a few safety devices are enough for most homes.

See *CHOICE*, August 2010 or choice.com.au/safetygates for buying advice; new results will appear in an upcoming issue.

Household chemicals and medication

Store these out of reach and out of sight. Keep chemicals and medication in their labelled containers – never in an old drink bottle or other container that might be appealing to a youngster.

Sharps Knives are an obvious hazard, but so are serrated edges on cling film boxes. Store them out of reach or put a lock on the cutlery drawer. Crockery is also best stored out of reach as it can shatter if played with roughly.

Dishwasher Knives are often left in the dishwasher where they may be accessible to toddlers. Keep the door firmly shut and only load it with detergent when you're about to turn on the dishwasher.

Power cords are a tripping, strangulation and electrical hazard. Hide them behind furniture or under rugs. Don't dangle cords over bench or table edges where a child might grab them.

Curtains and blind cords are strangulation hazards (especially looped cords). Choose split cords if possible and use a cord winder or cleat to stow them.

Latch on to safety

Chris Barnes checks out locks, furniture anchors and other devices designed to make your home toddler safe.

When you have a child, you begin to see potential hazards everywhere. Poisons, electrical sockets, climbable furniture – the ordinary home suddenly seems full of dangers for the inquisitive and mobile toddler. *CHOICE* looked at a range of home safety devices, including cupboard and drawer locks, door stoppers and latches, door handle covers, oven door latches, toilet seat locks and more.

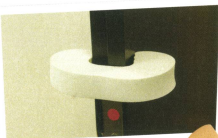
They're all potentially useful, but you probably won't need most of them; a few devices, together with some common sense and good safety habits, will ensure your home is safe enough. In the end, there's no substitute for keeping an eye on your kids and teaching them about safety.

Before you begin thinking about what sort of cupboard lock to buy, there are some more basic safety steps to consider.

House and garden

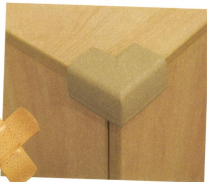
Windows and balconies Flyscreens aren't enough to prevent a child falling from a window. Install security locks that allow windows to be locked partly open for ventilation but stop a child climbing out. For balconies, check your child can't climb to the top of the wall or railing, and that there are no gaps to squeeze through.

Stairs Safety gates or barriers are a must for homes with stairs or fireplaces.



1. C-shaped door guard

2. Furniture corner guard



Garden sheds usually contain nasties such as tools, nails or weed killer, so lock the door.

Pools and spas must be fenced. CHOICE testing has found some pool fences don't meet the standard; see our report at choice.com.au/poolfences.

Locks, latches and more

If you need a safety device to secure a cupboard, door or other area, here's what to look for. With these, the key requirement is that it's too hard for your toddler to operate but easy for you. As far as possible, don't let your child see how to operate the lock – they learn faster than you think!

Adhesive Many locks and latches are attached with adhesive patches. Our test found some don't stick securely, possibly due to the adhesive deteriorating with age. Check the lock is firmly attached by pushing and pulling in all directions once attached. The flip side is that most aren't easy to remove once the kids have grown up – the adhesive pad can be left behind or mark the surface. Removable adhesive pads can be a good option, especially in rented homes.

Door guards and latches (1) The simplest is a C-shaped foam piece that fits onto the door edge and stops it closing fully, to prevent slamming on little fingers.

Furniture corner guards (2) protect small heads from sharp table corners,

but consider replacing your table completely if it has very sharp corners.

Cupboard door locks (3) Types include sliding ratchet locks that loop around door handles, and locks that fasten to each door and connect with a flexible or rigid bar or loop. Choose one that suits the handle design: if you can detach the lock with a bit of jiggling or pulling, so might a toddler. The lock should require some strength and dexterity to operate, enough to make it too hard for

a child but not so it's too annoying for you. Locks that require multiple actions such as pressing and sliding are best. Most will allow the doors to open a little, creating a gap that could pinch little fingers.

Drawer locks are internal catches, usually installed with screws. Several types are available, including magnetic handles. With these, the drawer handle is removed and a magnet fastened to the inside of the drawer. The drawer can then be opened with a separate magnetic handle, which can be kept out of reach of children. They're fiddly to install but are a secure option.

Furniture anchors Bookcases (and cabinets with drawers pulled out) can be climbed. Anchor them to the wall with a bracket or strap. Consider removing unstable furniture such as coat and plant stands.

Televisions Children have been killed by toppling TVs. Put yours on low, sturdy, stable furniture designed for the purpose, and anchor it to the wall.

If you rent your home, ask the landlord or agent for permission to install any permanent locks or other devices. They shouldn't refuse reasonable requests, but may require you to uninstall the devices when you leave.

Power point covers Plastic plugs are cheap and help keep kids out of power sockets. If you're building or renovating, consider power points with rotating safety covers.

Door handle covers make handles difficult to operate for children but can have the same effect for adults. They can also be fiddly to install.

A **fridge door latch** (placed high up) can be useful, but we found one basic velcro latch that even a toddler could overcome with a little determination.

Oven The chief risk from an oven is its heat when turned on, but if your child shows too much interest in playing with the oven, consider an oven door latch and control knob covers.

Washing machine Door locks are available for these, but always leave washing machine and dryer doors shut, and ideally prevent access to the laundry altogether.

Toilet seat locks aren't likely to be needed in most homes as toddler falls into toilets are fortunately rare. Do keep the bathroom off limits to littlies, though. ■

Basic home safety

Safety switches help prevent electrocution by tripping the switch when they detect an imbalanced current, such as when a person has accidentally touched the live circuit.

Smoke alarms Mains-powered alarms are preferable, and photoelectric models are best for homes; see *CHOICE*, March 2010 or choice.com.au/smokealarms.

First aid kit Consider learning CPR and how to treat burns, cuts and insect or spider bites. See *choice.com.au/firstaidkit* for what your kit should contain.

Window and door glass Any glass within reach should be safety glass, which is break resistant and shatters into small chunks rather than jagged pieces if broken.

3. Cupboard door locks

First wheels

The right bike will make your child's first ride safe and fun, says Rebecca Gatto.



Nutshell

- When buying a kids' bike, safety should be your biggest concern.
- Balance bikes are becoming a popular alternative to training wheels as a way of helping your child to master bike riding.

Safety should be the main priority when buying a bike for your child. Size is also important – don't be tempted to buy one that's too big thinking your child will grow into it. It may be hard for them to control and could lead to a crash.

Bikes sizes are based on their wheel diameter, usually stated in imperial and/or metric measurements on the wheel itself, and are generally appropriate for the following age groups:

- 3-5 years: 30cm/12in
- 6-8 years: 40cm/16in
- 9-11 years: 50cm/20in.

This is a guide only, and will vary according to your child's height. We recommend getting your bike assembled, checked and adjusted at a bike shop. For a small fee, it's a smart investment. ■

Don't be tempted to buy a bike that's too big thinking your child will grow into it

WHAT TO BUY

These models are still available from our previous test of kids' bikes in August 2010, passing all mandatory aspects of the safety standard. For the full results, go to choice.com.au/kidsbikes.

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Trek Jet 12 30cm/12in,
\$175



Malvern Star Radmax
50cm/20in, \$239



Trek Mystic 50cm/20in,
\$175

What about balance bikes?

A balance bike is a modern version of the draisienne or hobby horse. It has no pedals, crankset, chain or training wheels, so the child simply scoots their feet along the ground to gain speed and then raises them to coast along. Some come

with a rear-wheel hand brake. However, if the child isn't comfortable using it they simply drag their feet to stop. The idea is that the child learns to balance, steer and



stop before they move onto the more challenging task of pedalling. This approach has been popular in Europe, and in recent years has become more accepted in Australia too.

Sometimes called glide bikes, balance bikes are light and easy for children to move around and have a low centre of gravity. A child needs to be able to walk and be tall enough to straddle the bike before they can use one. About 18 months is a good age to get started.

Balance bike manufacturers claim children learn to ride a bike faster and generally move on to one with pedals and no training wheels with ease. Kids may

become dependent on training wheels, and may acquire bad habits that take time to unlearn. If training wheels are not adjusted correctly they can become an obstacle to learning.

While the concept is good, balance bikes have a limited life span. You can achieve the same effect simply and more cheaply by removing the pedals from a normal bike and then attaching them again when your child is ready. Simon Vincett of *Ride On* magazine recently reviewed the ByK E-250 First Bike (\$250) and gave it a score of 96%. Although this is not a balance bike, it could be used as one with the pedals off.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Size and fit Your child should be able to sit on the saddle and rest the balls of both feet on the ground. They should also be able to straddle the top bar with about 3cm-5cm clearance and reach the handlebars when sitting on the seat with a slight bend in their arms.

Construction Bikes should have consistent welds along the frame. Shake the bike to see if anything is loose or rattles. Also, any sharp projections should have covers.

Adjustment See how much you can adjust the seat post and handlebar. There should be a mark showing the maximum movement for the seat. If the adjustment capacity is small, your child will outgrow it fairly quickly.

Brakes Look for back pedal brakes, where your child can simply reverse their pedalling to stop. This allows them to concentrate on pedalling, balancing and steering without having to also coordinate handbrakes. Look for a handbrake with a lever that your child can grip easily.

Check they work effectively – for back pedal brakes, place the bike upside down and reverse the pedal movement. For front and rear rim brakes, push the bike forward when right way up and test by pulling the hand levers.

Wheels Lift the bike or put it upside down and spin the front and back wheels. If a wheel is not running true, you'll see a wobble as you look at it from the front or rear of the bike. The wheels shouldn't rub against anything or be difficult to turn, so ask the bike shop to adjust accordingly.

Training wheels Some argue that your child should learn to ride without training wheels (see above). Training wheels are potentially the easiest way to learn to ride but can also be the slowest and are dangerous at times. When using training wheels, the child sits higher up and the base width of the training wheel is quite narrow. So, if your child starts to pick up speed, the bike could topple over when they turn a corner. When turning, the weight is shifted from the rear to the outside training wheel, which will also reduce braking power.

Chain guard Children's bikes should have a guard that encloses the chain wheel and the upper run of the chain, and you should only be able to remove it with a tool.

Gears For beginners, a bike without gears is recommended, but as they get older, a few gears can make going up hills easier.

Pedals and handlebars There should be tread on both surfaces of the pedal and the ends of the handlebars should be covered so raw metal doesn't protrude. The handgrips should also be secure.

A **good helmet** should fit snugly on your child's head, sitting about 1cm-1.5cm above the eyebrows. It should allow good visibility, be a bright colour so it's easily seen and be easy to do up, undo and adjust.





Wheely secure

Chris Barnes discovers the best locks for securing your two-wheeled pride and joy.

Cycling grows ever more popular in Australia, and whether you're a keen road-racer, cycling commuter or Sunday rider, it's worth making sure your treasured bike isn't one of the many thousands stolen each year. *Ride On* magazine recently tested five D-locks and 10 cable locks, plus one innovative type (the Abus Bordo 6000) that's something of a cross between the two. They used tools that a thief might employ, including bolt cutters, hammers and even a portable angle grinder, and also rated the locks for ease of use. ■

Nutshell

► D-locks give the best protection, but cable locks can also be a good option. For more information, see the October-November 2011 issue of *Ride On*, or visit rideonmagazine.com.au.

Securing your bike

- **Leave it in a low-risk area** if possible – even bikes in plain sight in public areas are targets for thieves.
- **Secure it to an immovable object** that can't be cut through, or from which your locked bike can't be lifted clear. A bike parking rail is a good choice.
- **A D-lock through the bike frame plus a cable lock through the frame and wheels** is the most secure option. Wheels with quick-release skewers are easy targets so secure these tightly.
- **A soft silicone cover on a chain** can interfere with cutting tools. And on the two recommended D-locks, both sides of the U-shaped bar had to be cut as the lock wouldn't rotate out of the way after cutting just one side.
- **The thicker the lock (shackle, cable or chain), the harder it is to break.**
- **Take your bike lights and other removable components with you** after locking up your bike.
- **Record your bike details**, including serial number, in case of theft.

WHAT TO BUY

These are the pick of the bunch, but several other D-locks and cables also scored well – see *Ride On* for more information.

D-LOCKS

96%
Vulcan
VLS101B
Supreme
2000, \$40

- Weight: 954g
- Excellent value for money.
- Relatively light.



96%
Abus Granit
X-Plus 54, \$199

- Weight: 1397g
- Large loop.



CABLE
88%
Kryptonite
Hardwire
2018, \$100

- Weight: 1950g
- Long 2m cable is the toughest on test, but the key lock can be fiddly.



88%
Abus Bordo
6000, \$190

- Weight: 920g
- Consists of linked rigid sections.
- More compact than a D-lock and offers more locking options.



To mulch or not to mulch?

Matthew Steen rounds up the latest lawnmowers to find out which is best for you.

Nutshell

- Mulcher models distribute clippings into the lawn.
- All mowers on test cut well, but not all are easy to use.
- We didn't test two-stroke mowers, as they're too inefficient.

The smell of freshly cut grass can trigger happy memories or dread of a chore you'd prefer to avoid. Whatever your response, you'll want a lawnmower that cuts well and makes mowing as pleasant – or as quick – a job as possible.

While all models on test cut well, there are some substantial variations in terms of catcher design, how easy it is to change the cutting height and the design of the push handle.

Buying lawnmowers for this test proved difficult. There were limited mulcher models available thanks to manufacturers releasing mowers just before the beginning of summer, so we also included some catcher-only models. These are good if you just want to remove the clippings after mowing. However, the catcher/mulcher models give you the option of mulching (cutting finely) the grass clippings as

you mow and distributing them into the lawn rather than on top. We've separated the mulcher and catcher-only models into two tables (pages 71 and 72), but cutting scores for catcher mode are comparable between all models of both types.

There is one battery mulcher lawnmower on test; the rest have four-stroke petrol engines. One lawnmower, the AL-KO 470BRV, is self-propelled and the rest pushed by the user.

Self-propelled mowers work via the engine driving the rear wheels, usually activated when you push on a bar on the handle. This means less work as you just have to guide the mower rather than push it – a handy piece of technology.

We didn't include any Rovers as the new models weren't available at the time of testing. We also didn't include any two-stroke mowers due to their inefficient engines and excess exhaust emissions. ▶

Reliability

In our March reliability survey, members favoured Honda and Flymo mowers for reliability.

Brand loyalty Honda and John Deere owners are most likely to buy those brands again at 96% and 94% respectively.

Lawnmower problems

37% reported the engine failed to start while 11% said the cord didn't start the motor.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *

	(%)
Honda (569)	89
Flymo (163)	88
Masport (434)	86
Rover (423)	83
Victa (1275)	81
Other (1063)	78
John Deere (120)	75
Toro (59)	73
All lawnmowers (4106)	82

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.

WHAT TO BUY

We've recommended combination models that score 85% overall and at least 70% for ease of use.

For profiles of all models, go to choice.com.au/lawnmowers



85%

AL-KO Silver Premium 470BRV, \$599

Good points

- Engine brake – engine stops almost instantly when the bar is released.
- Self-propelled drive with six speeds.
- Very easy to adjust the cutting height.
- Starter cord is very easy to pull.
- Easy to convert from catcher to mulching mode.

Bad points

- Initial assembly takes a long time.
- Handlebar becomes uncomfortable with extended use and wobbles.
- Catcher lets dust and small grass clippings through the holes, showering the user.



85%

Ryobi Cordless Lawn Mower Kit RLM36, \$499

Good points

- Cuts 480 square metres of grass with one battery charge.
- Quick-release handle for easy folding.
- Much quieter than petrol models.
- Very small handle vibration only.
- Very easy to adjust the cutting height.
- Starting the motor is very easy.
- Easy to convert from catcher to mulching mode.

Bad points

- Borderline for cutting long grass.
- Catcher lets dust and small grass clippings through the holes, showering the user.



85%

Victa Corvette 650 GMS486, \$649

Good points

- Quick-release handle for easy folding.
- Snorkel for the engine to keep the dust away from the air filter.
- Very comfortable handle.
- Catcher is easy to remove/attach and empty.
- Easy to convert from catcher to mulching mode.

Bad points

- Adjusting the cutting height lever requires a fair amount of effort.
- Starter cord requires a fair amount of effort to pull.

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CATCHER-ONLY

PERFORMANCE

SPECIFICATIONS

	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Cutting score (% with catcher)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise at 7.5 m/user's position (dB)	Type	Starter toggle	Cutting positions (as counted)	Cutting height range (mm, measured)	Width of cut (cm, measured)	Closeness of cut to a vertical edge (mm, front / right / left)	Weight (kg)	Contact
Victa Bronco BRA484 (A)	599	85	98	72	72 / 87	C / P	On motor	10	15-70	48	115 / 18 / 18	28	victa.com.au
Sanli Power Cut 460 PCS400	329	79	95	62	72 / 86	C / P	On motor	10	10-65	46	125 / 40 / 23	31	sanli.com.au
Pope Aurora 101PM450	246	77	93	60	70 / 86	C / P	On motor	6	12-80	44	155 / 35 / 35	27	toro.com.au

Overall score is made up of: Cutting score with catcher: 50%; Ease of use: 50%. Price Average retail, as of September 2011. C Catcher; P Push; (A) Discontinued, but may be available in some stores.

CATCHER/MULCHER	PERFORMANCE					SPECIFICATIONS											
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Cutting score (% with catcher)		Cutting score (% mulching)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise at 7.5 m / user's position (dB)	Type	Motor	Starter toggle	Cutting positions (as counted)		Cutting height range (mm, measured)	Width of cut (cm, measured)	Closeness of cut to a vertical edge (mm, front / right / left)	Weight (kg)	Contact
AL-KO Silver Premium 470BRV	599	85	98	100	71	70/82	C/M/S	Petrol	On motor	7	30-70	46	135/40/18	37	alko.com.au		
Ryobi Cordless Kit RLM36	499	85	88	95	78	65/80	C/M/P	Battery	On handle	5	16-65	40	135/32/32	18	ryobi.com.au		
Victa Corvette 650 GMS486	649	85	98	100	71	74/86	C/M/P	Petrol	On motor	10	15-70	48	115/18/18	28	victa.com.au		
Masport President 4000ST Combo 579937	729	84	98	100	68	75/90	C/M/P	Petrol	On handle	11	3-66	48	120/12/15	28	masport.com.au		
Victa Mustang MCA485	729	84	98	100	68	76/91	C/M/P	Petrol	On motor	10	15-70	48	115/18/18	28	victa.com.au		
SupaSwift Lawn Range Blue	439	83	95	100	68	70/83	C/M/P	Petrol	On handle	10	17-58	45	110/18/18	30	allpower.com.au		
Masport President 2000 Combo 567817	649	82	98	100	64	73/88	C/M/P	Petrol	On handle	10	10-88	46	130/35/22	26	masport.com.au		
Toro Recycler 20323	696	82	98	100	64	70/85	C/M/P	Petrol	On handle	7	25-105	50	155/18/18	29	toro.com.au		
Honda HRU19M1PKUA	839	80	98	100	61	73/85	C/M/P	Petrol	On handle	11	12-70	47	135/15/15	33	hondampe.com.au		
Honda HRU196M1PBUH	1039	70	98	100	40	71/83	C/M/P	Petrol	On handle	11	12-70	47	135/15/15	43	hondampe.com.au		

USING THE TABLES Overall score is made up of: Cutting: 50% (with catcher: 25%, with mulcher: 25%) Ease of use: 50% C Catcher M Mulcher P Push S Self-propelled.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Handle This should be comfortable to hold and height-adjustable. A turned-up handle is easier on your wrists and gives better control over the mower.

Engine control lever should be on the handlebar and easy to operate.

Manoeuvrability The mower should be easy to push and manoeuvre in all conditions. Big wheels improve handling on rough ground and a lightweight model is easier to push and turn.

Starter cord is generally easier to operate when it's on the engine, but a cord mounted half-way up the handle is good if you can't easily bend over.

Cutting positions Look for a large number spread over a useful range of cutting heights. Make sure the cutting height is easily adjustable.

Cleaning A wash port or nozzle on top of

the mower's housing makes it easy to clean underneath and on top of it.

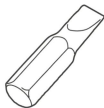
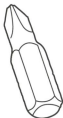
Mulching adapter or plug should be easy to fit and remove.

Maintenance Can you easily change the oil, air filter and spark plugs?

Catcher A good catcher has two handles – one on top for carrying, and one on the back for easy emptying.



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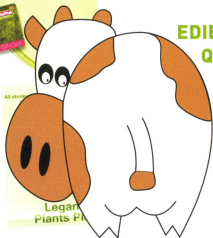
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Edibles for your garden



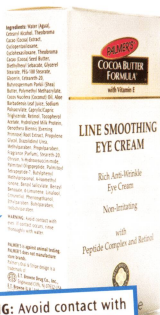
EDIBLE? QUESTIONABLE

Alongside the veggies depicted under this header, reader Allan Bennett discovered some Moo Poo, as well as poisonous copper-based fungicide.

Hard Word

Eye scream

Eye specialist Paul Adler was intrigued by this "non-irritating" eye cream.



WARNING: Avoid contact with eyes. If contact occurs, rinse thoroughly with water.

Thanks this month go to Paul Adler, Ron Quick, Gisela Loader, Allan Bennett and Annette Lyons. If you have any examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries - we need the unmarked originals.

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